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**Who Are Anonymous?  
A Study Of Online Activism**

Collins, Benjamin Thomas

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Who Are Anonymous? A Study Of Online Activism  
Benjamin Thomas Collins  
King's College London, War Studies  
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## Abstract

The activist network “Anonymous” has protested and launched cyber-attacks for and against a spectrum of socio-political causes around the world since 2008. The subsequent coverage and debate have described Anonymous but has generally done little to explore their political, cultural and historical contexts. Anonymous are an important development in how we use communications technologies for political means and ends. Their reactionary political positioning and pop-culture imagery from the role of moveable type printing in the Reformation to the Electric Telegraph as a technological and social precursor of the internet.

This thesis uses contemporary media coverage of Anonymous’ actions, prior research in the field of “Anonymous Studies” and Anonymous-authored primary source materials to answer these questions of Anonymous’ historical development, motivation and direction. This thesis expands on this central historical narrative through examining Anonymous’ use of pop-culture as political shorthand, how their methods and visual style have been adopted by others; as well as the political, legal and social responses to Anonymous by their targets and the “internet culture” from which they came.

Anonymous is a decentralised activist/protest community who define themselves through opposition. Anonymous position themselves as the antithesis of everything their current target is or represents, establishing solidarity and common cause among an otherwise disparate community. This almost always takes place as a reaction to causes which have already reached a critical mass of mainstream attention. Despite the reduction of Anonymous’ novelty and impact over time, their methods have become templates for conducting aggressive and irregular political actions through the internet. This thesis combines research avenues which have not been directly connected to Anonymous or each other, expanding the small but growing field of “Anonymous Studies,” providing a strong historical and analytical basis for future research.

### Acknowledgements

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## Table of Contents

Glossary of Terms.....	6
Chapter One – Introduction.....	7
Research Questions.....	10
Methodology.....	15
Literature Review.....	27
Chapter Overview.....	41
Chapter Two – From 4chan to Political Mobilisation.....	46
4chan and /b/.....	47
The growth of proto-Anonymous, /b/-day and the self-fulfilling prophecy.....	62
The first digital skirmishes and the formation of proto-Anonymous.....	63
Conclusion.....	70
Chapter Three – The Connected Society.....	71
Martin Luther, the Printing Press and the Reformation.....	74
Copyright, the Church and the fight back for information control.....	80
The proximity of history; the Electric Telegraph, Public Libraries and Facebook.....	82
Conclusion.....	91
Chapter Four – Project Chanology and Payback.....	93
Project Chanology – Anonymous steps into the light.....	94
The snowballing of Payback and Avenge Assange.....	109
Conclusion.....	117
Chapter Five – Anonymous and the Rewiring of Pop-Culture Imagery.....	119
The imagery of Anonymous.....	120
Gunpowder, treason and plot; Anonymous and Guy Fawkes.....	126
The Spectacular Culture Industry and the political re-appropriation loop.....	129
The counter-appropriation of Anonymous.....	141
Conclusion.....	150
Chapter Six – Serious business and the end of the lulz.....	152
Wikileaks, Tunisia and LulzSec.....	153
LulzSec.....	161
The end of the Lulz.....	165
Anonymous and beyond – the Syrian Electronic Army, Lizard Squad and the Fancy Bears.....	175
Conclusion.....	183
Chapter Seven – The Other Side of the Mask.....	185
The long tail of communications technologies as a political tool.....	185
Anonymous and the legal system.....	190
The International Response to Anonymous.....	198

“We r legun” - The Internet Responds to Anonymous.....	207
Conclusion.....	220
Chapter Eight – Should we continue to expect Anonymous?.....	222
The broader sphere of digital activism – where does Anonymous fit?.....	223
Post-LulzSec degradation and dilution of attention.....	227
The Anonymous Paradox.....	232
Anonymous versus ISIS; a war of perception.....	241
Conclusion.....	255
Chapter Nine – Conclusion.....	257
Anonymous – should we continue to expect them?.....	263
Future Research.....	281
Bibliography.....	283

## Glossary of Terms

“Anon”	Someone who identifies with/as Anonymous.
DDOS	Distributed Denial of Service. A form of cyber-attack which aims to slow or crash a targeted server by sending more requests for information than it can respond to. This process is typically automated but Anonymous have used manual DDOS programs such as the LOIC.
Doxxing	Finding personal information about one or more target individuals such as where they live, phone numbers, email addresses and family members. This information is posted online. This is meant to intimidate the target as anyone could find them or use their information to commit fraud.
IRC	Internet Relay Chat. A text-based internet chat program created in 1988. It is used by Anonymous as it does not rely on a centralised server infrastructure.
LOIC	Low-Orbit Ion Cannon. A computer network stress-testing tool created by the US Navy which Anonymous have renamed (the name comes from the Command and Conquer video game franchise) and adapted to conduct DDOS attacks.
“Newfag”	Derogatory term for someone whose statements and actions indicate they do not understand the social conventions or cultural norms of an online community. The ‘-fag’ suffix does not explicitly imply homophobic connotations and has become a ubiquitous term of identity.
Pastebin.com	A website where anyone can post text files which are viewable indefinitely or for a finite period. Used by Anonymous for press releases and doxxing.
“Press release”	An announcement of intent to launch a DDOS/doxx/otherwise harass or embarrass a target. These are usually a text statement on Pastebin.com or a YouTube video in which a synthesised voice reads the text aloud.
Project Chanology	Anonymous’ first major operation against the Church of Scientology in 2008.
“The lulz”	A corruption of the abbreviation ‘lol’, meaning ‘laugh out loud’. This is a hedonistic statement of self-justification; ‘doing it for the lulz/I did it for the lulz’, a specific action carried out for its comic potential. A common phrase in Anonymous’ early years but has fallen out of use since 2011.

## Chapter One – Introduction

It is just after 3pm on a cold and rainy November afternoon in central London. Standing outside the elevated front entrance to the National Gallery on the north side of Trafalgar Square you can look across the Square, past Nelson's Column and down Whitehall where, in the distance, the clock tower of the Palace of Westminster which houses Big Ben is visible above the skyline. Even at this time of year city landmarks like Trafalgar Square and the National Gallery attract crowds of tourists festooned with cameras and smart phones. Bracing themselves against the wind and on this occasion traditionally British light drizzle, they take group pictures next to, in front of and on the large lion statues at the base of Nelson's Column. By contrast the commuters can be seen taking the path of least resistance through the open expanse of pavement; they keep their heads forward and dodge between each other and tourists who form brightly-coloured waterproof islands in a river of grey overcoats and umbrellas. Trafalgar Square plays host for many large-scale events throughout the year; from Chinese New Year to Gay Pride to fan events by visiting American Football teams. However neither the tourists nor the commuters are paying much attention to the more subtle signs that another more esoteric event is about to take place.

Two silver-grey London Metropolitan Police vans are parked at the top of the broad central staircase which leads down from the National Gallery into Trafalgar Square. Both are full of police officers who are visible only as silhouettes against the lights of the square through the tinted windows. Additional police and other security staff slowly circle the square and talk to each other and into their radios, managing to look vigilant and utterly bored at the same time. They keep their eyes on a group of people standing on one of the raised areas flanking Trafalgar Square's central staircase, a group which slowly appeared with no fanfare out of the afternoon crowds and has been growing in size for the last couple of hours. This group appears to be prepared for standing outside in a British winter for an extended period of time; many wear thick jackets, umbrellas and backpacks. Many are wearing or carrying masks, a stylised moustachioed face with a wry smile. Some have customised their masks with adornments ranging from simple repaints to adding glowing tubes or lights, some female attendees have painted over the facial hair and have added lipstick, eyelashes and other cosmetic adornments.



More similarly-dressed people arrive over the course of the afternoon, standing onto the stairs, around the area in front of the National Gallery and on the Square itself. There is soon a forest of banners, placards and flags illustrating governmental or corporate wrongdoing, promoting agendas which range from environmentalism to communism to general statements of disharmony and calls for revolution. As the sun goes down the police presence grows to match the crowd and soon the square is full of people, some with masks, and some without. News crews navigate the crowd, the lights on their cameras illuminating white-masked faces as they conduct interviews. Police officers also pick their way through the crowds, handing out pieces of paper indicating rules and time-limits for the evening's events. On one side of this paper is a list of warnings and times and on the other is a map marking out a section of central London in red as the permitted area for the protest. The officers handing these out are challenged by an individual with a megaphone who denounces these papers as voodoo magic by the establishment to control our thoughts and that we should not read them.

By 6pm the sun has gone down and the square, previously full of masked protesters, suddenly begins to empty as the crowds head south towards Whitehall and the Houses of Parliament. A large column of people brandishing signs, blowing air horns, shouting slogans such as "One solution, revolution!" and "Whose streets? Our streets!" crosses the roundabout on the south-eastern corner of Trafalgar Square, blocking any cars and buses unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. This column continues down Whitehall in a wave of masked people, stopping to shout and yell outside the large black gates of Downing Street, lines of photographers firing volleys of camera flashes at the horde all the way. After no more than 20 minutes the last of the crowd has left Trafalgar Square and all that's left is a large number of police officers standing among the litter and trampled signs.

Parliament Square has been reinforced with several rows of barricades which prevent access to its grassy centre. The protesters are forced into the road and flow around the marooned cars, chanting, shouting and singing as banks of police in high-visibility jackets attempt to contain them and extract the unfortunate vehicles therein. As the crowds press against the lines of police outside Parliament groups begin to break off and head towards Buckingham Palace or Oxford Street. At this point the previously-established rules of place and time have been disregarded by both sides, the casual participants disperse to go home or be warm

somewhere else while the more hard-core elements intent on a night of running battles with the police make their intentions for such actions clear by clashing against the barriers and hurling whatever they can find. Similar circumstances and events take place and are reported in cities around the world on the same day. This day is November 5, known in England as Guy Fawkes or Bonfire Night.

These people identify with the complex collective identity of ‘Anonymous’, a symbolic language and set of political imagery which bridges the gaps between activism, social media, online harassment and popular culture. Anonymous is the latest example of our long-standing political relationship with communications technology. In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century this relationship impacts almost every facet of our individual and collective lives through the ubiquity of the internet. The symbols and broad political ideas which make up the Anonymous identity can be applied by anyone to establish common cause on an otherwise personally-disconnected communication platform such as the internet. This commonality allows the hacker-activist communities who operate through it to insert themselves into political issues and world events through verbose threats, ‘press releases’ and launching attacks against a target’s computer systems.

Anonymous is a malleable identity open to individual interpretation which has been active in a recognisable manner for less than ten years, a long time on the internet. With no central authority or defined political mandate Anonymous is also a conundrum. On the one hand their actions can be seen as those of individuals challenging systems or social structures they deem unfair and impossible to affect through traditional political channels. Alternatively they can be seen as a mob of technologically-adept vigilantes who attack targets on a whim with no accountability, not even to themselves. The Anonymous identity is driven by the external stimuli of world events which echo around the online social network environment. Once these events, which range from revelations of corporate and governmental wrong-doing to acting in support of or against protests around the world, gain a sufficient critical mass of popularity, Anonymous-identifying individuals are able to use them as a common unifying cause for solidarity among an otherwise disparate constituency. This tautological self-identification makes understanding Anonymous a difficult task, one that this thesis seeks to attempt from an under-utilised perspective in the broader existing literature.

## **Research Questions**

Where did Anonymous come from and how did they develop into a political activist identity? Where does Anonymous fit in the wider spectrum of contemporary digital politics? This research will answer these questions by charting Anonymous' history from a small internet community to a universal protest franchise. This will be balanced by taking a wider historical perspective to consider whether many of the causes Anonymous has been used for are new to the internet; the privacy and security of communication technologies and the commercialisation of information. Are these relatively new developments or are there examples of similar socio-political tensions we can apply to help understand Anonymous, or at least why Anonymous is such a difficult subject to define?

This thesis will answer these questions by exploring the development of Anonymous from the mid-2000s onwards, analysing how a small yet concentrated subset of internet culture grew into a bellicose symbolic identity which serves as a common denominator of political dissent around the world. This research will balance this contemporary focus by placing Anonymous in the wider historical context of the use of communication technologies as political tools throughout history. This process will draw on examples such as the printing press' role in the Protestant Reformation and the similarities between the use of the Electric Telegraph in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the internet today. This will also include a comparison between attitudes to information control and ownership, drawing on the creation of public libraries in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the implementation of free yet heavily controlled internet access programmes around the world by Facebook in the 2010s.

This research will examine how an emergent phenomenon such as Anonymous developed almost entirely online. The hacker-activist Anonymous identity is a modern convergence of politicised symbols and ideas which are a reflection of the unusual characteristics of its formative online environment. This research will explore Anonymous' historical development, charting how this community of shared political and notional non-identity grew from internet trolls into a self-applied tautological label of political resistance and protest.

Anonymous' external persona is built on the convention of resisting identity; presenting themselves as a decentralised network operating without recognisable leaders, figureheads or

representatives. As will be discussed throughout this research, this outward image is at odds with the reality of Anonymous' day-to-day activities and social structure behind the mask, where Twitter accounts, Facebook groups have solidified Anonymous into the kind of social hierarchy they claim to have eschewed. Disagreements over the legitimacy of specific targets or broader debates over what Anonymous is or isn't have been periodically highlighted through Twitter and the mainstream media. These moments highlight that Anonymous are as fallible as the rest of us, undermining Anonymous' reputation and opening them up to wider criticism.

Anonymous' decentralised rhetoric changes to fit the cause or controversy it has been applied in reaction to, however these causes are broadly anti-government/anti-corporate or in some cases class-based in nature, capitalising on the '99%' language of the Occupy movement among others. However sentiments such as these have existed before Anonymous, before the internet and before electricity. This motivation for resisting the world narratives of authority have been accelerated and expanded upon through the incremental leaps in communications technologies over the last half millennium. Anonymous are a modern example of this friction between the autonomous reality of the individual and that of the state or other ruling institutions. Understanding the history of this relationship between communications technologies and those who use them for subversive means is an important part of understanding Anonymous' motivations and methods today. The common grievances for those who consider themselves Anonymous are social and political issues of privacy, civil liberties, freedom of speech, freedom of information and the balance of power between the state and the people. These issues have been topics of debate and contest for centuries, as such they are unlikely to be resolved quickly, if at all. Therefore the likelihood of people adopting or identifying with these grievances is as equally unlikely to be placated quickly, if at all.

What makes Anonymous stand out is the communication environment from which they came, which shaped their social and political structures and without which Anonymous simply would not exist. As will be discussed throughout this research, Anonymous' history has shown this to be both a benefit and a hindrance. Anonymous are not an organised movement or group in the conventional sense. The Anonymous identity is more like a brand or franchise, a unifying common denominator that brings people together in protest and resistance.

Anonymous' lack of figureheads or leaders means that no one person has enough influence to represent everyone who participates and considers themselves 'Anonymous'. This serves both the ideological purpose of preventing the kind of hierarchies and centralised control they oppose, and as a form of collective oversight. However, this also means that any attempt at conflict resolution through conventional methods of consultation and negotiation are futile; there is no central political fulcrum which holds sway over the rest of Anonymous. Combined with the inherently capricious and cynical attitude Anonymous collectively nurtures this means such measures will never succeed if they are considered at all.

Motivation and political positioning have been common threads throughout Anonymous' history; from the global protests against the Church of Scientology in 2008 and the freezing of Wikileaks' assets in 2010 to their sporadic efforts against ISIS since 2014. None of these operations were instigated as part of any internal manifesto or previously-agreed plan but, as with the vast majority of Anonymous' operations, were reactions to external circumstances beyond their control which were already gaining social and political traction. This is a necessary process for Anonymous to survive and to stay relevant in a fast-moving digital medium and to maintain a base of activist supporters to draw from. This reciprocal process is fuelled by a kaleidoscope of reactionary hyperbole which accelerates as each participating Anon adds their grievances or at least their voice to the collective whole. Combined with their use of popular culture as a façade for their interactions with the public, their targets and the media, Anonymous has earned a reputation as a shadowy and mysterious hacker hive-mind, one that has become a pop-culture artefact itself. It is this outward image and identity which is the most important when looking at Anonymous and their interactions with the wider world.

Anonymous' relatively recent development means that the research community around them has been quite small but has expanded in recent years as the focus of their operations has expanded and the details of momentous events like the rise and fall of the hacking group LulzSec in 2011 have been made public. The problem of researching Anonymous is twofold; firstly it requires a looser adherence to concepts such as necessity of author identity. In short, many of the sources and materials that are available by Anonymous-identifying individuals are not signed by an identifiable author, simply signing it 'Anonymous' or through an online pseudonym that may or may not be linked to an individual, making tracking down an author

of a particular piece among a crowd of similarly masked and capricious participants an exercise in futility.

This notional rejection of the constructs of identity in terms of authoring outward-facing materials both serves to reinforce the projected image of a hive mind-like group, as well as reducing the primacy on the verifiable identity of the author. In the context of Anonymous' tautological and self-fulfilling structure of participation rather than membership, the desire or self-identity as Anonymous validates and justifies such a stance; an interesting conundrum this thesis seeks to unpick.

The second complicating factor in studying Anonymous is their short attention span which they inherited from their fast-moving online developmental environment. As part of this shedding of the political geography of identity the volume of visible materials, texts, images and videos that are distributed by Anonymous-identifying activists into the public space is eclipsed by the volume of discussion and other materials which is not recorded or preserved in a readily-accessible way. Many of the sources in this thesis do not come from books or journals, sources of bottled and preserved history and ideas whose longevity and robustness come at the price of being snapshots of thought and history, certainly when compared to the human and mechanical speeds the internet as a mass communication medium facilitates. Through this churn of new content and information replacing old, many of the sources in this research may be inaccessible in the future as news websites prune old or seemingly irrelevant materials, data is deleted to save hosting costs or websites simply disappear for legal or mundane personal reasons.

Fortunately there are archives of internet culture which preserve the otherwise perishable history of internet culture would be lost, including much of Anonymous' own history. This history dates back to at least 2004 and has been recorded on a nebulous cloud of internet forums, image-board posts, chat logs and YouTube videos. These mediums are unstable and can cease to exist at any moment unless they are recorded for posterity. The fragile and transient nature of online information means it is equally vulnerable to efficient and effective censorship or control for more direct political reasons; a story or website can vanish or be

vanished quicker and easier than physical printed materials<sup>1</sup>. Many of these mediums and materials therefore have to be taken at face value to a certain extent; In the same way that the author of the 4chan message which sparked the anti-Scientology protests which gave the Anonymous identity its public image, language and strategic template will never be identified, many of the author(s) of the Anonymous source materials herein are lost to the short-term memory black hole of the internet as they are spread and re-hosted across multiple social media platforms. This process raises a further question; if Anonymous is a tautological and symbolic language that anyone can use then do we have to accept that anyone who creates or writes something as 'Anonymous' is as relevant or applicable as anyone else who does the same? As will be discussed in chapters 7 and 8, interpreting such materials and separating 'genuine' Anonymous materials, which are built on their own layers of satire and word-play, and those which offer satirical criticism requires a significant time investment to keep up with the meta-Zeitgeist of memes, operations, global politics and the tone of Anonymous' reflection in the media at a given point in their developmental history. As will be discussed in the next chapter Anonymous' forging in the crucible of 4chan has instilled an element of this self-referential satire within Anonymous' outward-facing public persona. This is further complicated by Anonymous' aforementioned tautological and bottom-up outward rejection of the concepts of membership and authority; however it is the cracks and gaps which form in the space between this projection and the reality of their physical/online activities where we can gain some understanding of the Anonymous identity and those who attach themselves to it.

Anonymous is inherently reactionary and ultimately relies on the same targets they attack, a process which is endemic to Anonymous' history, methods and tactical targeting rationale. Anonymous needs a constant supply of fresh targets to ensure operational cohesion and sustain the feedback loop of media/social media attention necessary to sustain momentum and avoid the kind of rapid-onset entropy inherent to the online environment from which they came. This critical analysis of Anonymous' relevance or popularity includes exploring their relationship with ISIS/ISIL/IS/Daesh, an enemy who is perhaps the best target Anonymous could have hoped for; a resilient and, from a western perspective, morally straightforward enemy with no risk of legal repercussion.

1 Heather Brooke, *The Revolution Will Be Digitised* (United Kingdom: Windmill Books, 2012), 13.

## Methodology

Conducting contemporary historical research is an inherently problematic process where ‘...not all questions can be answered...But this should not discourage historians from asking them’.<sup>2</sup> It is easy to become too involved in developing events, or to make judgements and conclusions without suitable time and distance for (relatively) objective conclusions based on as complete a picture as possible, to ensure that ‘...after close and prolonged reflection. We begin to see why things happened as they did, and to write history instead of newspapers’.<sup>3</sup>

This problem was a practical and theoretical concern throughout the lifespan of the project; how do you explore and understand a nebulous, reflective and semi-criminal network of political activists such as Anonymous; a fairly niche group despite their global socio-political impact, in a way which does not merely repeat the research of others into this relatively small field compared to the broader themes and political topics which permeate their historical development and discourse?

A further compounding factor for this question was that by late 2012/early 2013 when this research began in earnest, as will be discussed in chapters 6 to 8, Anonymous appeared to be a spent force. They had been undone by betrayal and a fracturing of collective momentum, resulting in a dilution of capability and a lack of relevance in the mainstream debate around the issues which Anonymous-identifying activists have worked for. This would mean having to write this research as a relatively contemporary account of a political activist network as well as an obituary of sorts; outlining the processes and reasons for their initial rise, fall, dramatic return and ultimately Icarian demise.

The initial methodological framework for this research was built on the premise that the only way to understand a modern mass communication-enabled political phenomenon like Anonymous was through naturalistic, prolonged observations and interactions. This was going to take the form of a long-term ethnographic study of Anonymous; at least 12 months of discussions, informal interviews and IRC server log files detailing the mundane day-to-day activities of Anonymous as well as the periods of collective excitement and alignment

2 Peter Catterall, “What (if anything) is Distinctive about Contemporary History?,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no.4 (1997), 446.

3 R.G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis* (Oxford, 1924), 82.



surrounding the planning and execution of operations and campaigns. These were to be accompanied by my own thoughts, observations and other notes.

Participants would have been largely self-selecting; drawing from a clearly defined set of online spaces which have been unequivocally outlined as being affiliated to Anonymous therefore anyone who is using them has made a deliberate choice to do so. Anyone doing this can therefore be identified as a participatory cultural member of Anonymous. For the 'real life' aspect of this research, it would be very easy to identify participants at the protests/demonstrations that Anonymous orchestrate or have a vested interest in. Their distinctive iconography and paraphernalia – including Guy Fawkes masks and other imagery taken from the 2005 film/1985 graphic novel *V for Vendetta* – makes them very conspicuous and easy to identify amongst non-participants attending the same events.

This proposal necessitated addressing a number of serious ethical considerations relating to informed consent, the right to withdraw and the necessity for covert research in some cases. The majority of fieldwork was to be carried out in the fluid and fluctuating environment of Anonymous' IRC servers with participants connecting and disconnecting at of their own free will. The processes of fully informed consent and full disclosure, procedures that in medical models of research from which they originated are absolutely necessary, are varyingly inappropriate for certain types of social research. Social research has to consider a spectrum of contingencies, consent documentation and information sheets cannot hope to cover every probable outcome and eventuality that comes from working in comparatively chaotic environments. William Whyte's seminal work 'Street Corner Society' would have been severely constrained to the point of futility if he had been required to dispense consent forms every time he met someone new or participated in a conversation on a topic outside of the research boundaries during his research of life in an Italian immigrant slum district in Boston.<sup>4</sup>

Attempts to ensure absolute informed consent in such environments would be disruptive, altering the very “real life” behaviours that I intended to study. Peter Lugosi took on the role of a bartender to study hospitality in an establishment with a clientele of mixed sexualities

4 William Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. United States of America: University of Chicago Press, 1993

where attempting to establish consent with every customer would have been a disruptive invasion of privacy and likely to alter the behaviours being observed to the point of invalidating the study at worst and undermining the research at best.<sup>5</sup>

The intention was therefore to meet the intention and spirit of informed consent, conversationally communicating the purpose and focus of the research to both the administrators of Anonymous' online social landscape and its population as required. This more flexible form of consent was a more appropriate method for two reasons. Firstly such formalised procedures of identification and signing of official documentation would have gone against Anonymous' cultural norms and practices as formalised signatures and recording of participation could be interpreted as a breach of confidentiality. Secondly, due to the majority of the research taking place online I would have been unable to verify any personal details or the identities of participants – given Anonymous' capricious nature, they are likely to be falsified if given at all, and asking for such information would have been a further breach of confidentiality. As their name suggests, Anonymous' cultural practises and ideology are, unsurprisingly, based on concepts of digital anonymity. This approach is perpetuated by the anonymity offered by IRC. Each user chooses a particular user-name or pseudonym, which becomes their identity in this particular environment. As such seeking participants' real identities through a formalised consent process would be seen as a breach of confidentiality, trust and culturally acceptable behaviour. While a participant's pseudonym could potentially be used, this would be incredibly difficult to track, almost impossible to verify and would be hard to justify ethically – having the signature of (for example) “BladeWolf75” would mean very little and be difficult to verify or attribute to a particular individual.

5 Peter Lugosi, “Between Overt and Covert Research: Concealment and Disclosure in an Ethnographic Study of Commercial Hospitality,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no.3 (2006)

This framework sought to create an environment for sustained consent over the lengthy period required for work of this kind which is more appropriate for anthropological research:

Formalising consent to a piece of paper or a formulaic recitation destroys what it is intended to protect. It does this, first, by breaching interpersonal etiquette because it questions the trust that must underlie the interpersonal relations on which the research is based. In other words, it removes the right of...people to consent to the research in the way in which they believe their consent ought to be given: by their intimacy and their participation with the anthropologist's work. Second, given that anthropological fieldwork is long-term and on-going, over months and even years, formal consent — whether written or verbal — at one point in time removes people's right to withdraw consent at a later time, and to deny their past involvement, if they later wish to do so... Thus, it is unwritten and non-formalised verbal consent which best typifies participant observation in anthropology. It means that people's consent must be renewed each day - through their continuing interaction with the researcher and the project, through their help, co-operation and assent... Phrased another way, anthropological research can only take place in the light of informed consent - given continuously, openly and graciously because we are behaving, and have behaved, properly.<sup>6</sup>

For the purpose of this research, both Anonymous' online environment and their attendance at physical protests can be categorised as 'public spaces', in which participants can reasonably expect to be observed by strangers. In the case of Anonymous' protests/demonstrations such as the annual event on November 5th in central London, these are conducted in public and open areas such as Trafalgar Square and Parliament Square. In these locales written consent to observe and interact with those participating would not be required outside of the context of the proposed research, so would not be necessary in these cases as the participants would be being observed by the public, media, police and every security/CCTV system in the area as well as by each other.

All of the servers I intended to visit publicise their IP addresses, as well as offer guides and tutorials that explain how to connect to them. For example, the AnonOps server has a dedicated section explaining Anonymous' history, as well as guides for Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), encryption, security and how to use various IRC clients to connect to the server. The servers themselves do not record what is said between users. This factor in itself serves to maintain privacy and confidentiality in the long-term, as there is no centralised database or record from which conversations could be retrieved at a later date. However, a

6 Marilyn Silverman, *Everyday Ethics: A Personal Journey in Rural Ireland, 1980–2001*, in Pat Caplan (ed.) *The Ethics of Anthropology: Debates and Dilemmas* (Routledge, 2004), 117.

common feature of the several available IRC clients needed to connect to an IRC server lets a user choose to log and record all conversations while they are connected. Due to the client/server setup it is impossible to know if anyone else is recording the conversations that are taking place. Due to the text-based nature of the research environment, the relative degrees of consent among participants are much easier to gauge. What would originally necessitate an informal, oral consent becomes closer to the concept of formal written consent.

These IRC servers are an open online environment in which anyone can participate and potentially record all that is said through locally storing server logs. The normal Internet user may not be fully aware to what degree their activities are tracked routinely, as well as the myriad privacy policies of the sites they visit<sup>7</sup> however Anonymous are a political activist network who campaign for the reduction of internet regulation and the promotion of information freedom. As such they can be considered an exception to this viewpoint.

An important part of the consent process is disclosure of the research purpose, ensuring all participants are as fully informed as possible. However as William Whyte discovered that attempting to explain the entirety of the study to everyone he talked to often overwhelmed them, that he was:

...providing far more information about myself and my study to leaders...than I volunteered to the average corner boy. I always tried to give the impression that I was willing and eager to tell just as much about my study as anyone wished to know, but it was only with group leaders that I made a particular effort to provide really full information.<sup>8</sup>

The intention was to apply the lessons from this example and adopt a similar model of disclosure for my research into Anonymous – full disclosure of the research process to the server administrators as they would be the gatekeepers and possibly the most useful participants or informants. From this point, in a similar manner to the notion of operating within the spirit of informed consent, information about the study would be disclosed to the wider participant groups when and where appropriate. Some participants might not have been interested in the research, so insisting on full disclosure would be an intrusive and disruptive

7 Chris J Hoofnagle & Jennifer King, “What Californians Understand About Privacy Online”, Research Report from Samuelson Law Technology & Public Policy Clinic, UC Berkeley Law: Berkeley, CA. 2008

8 Whyte, 301.

act. Also, revealing the full nature of the research may have altered the behaviour of the participants, therefore invalidating the research.

The above justifications also partly explain the difficulties in presenting an information sheet to all participants. Much like the problems of a consent form, it would be very extremely difficult to provide every participant of a fluid and centralised online environment with an information sheet. Such procedures would be disruptive and a breach of cultural norms. As such I intend to omit this procedure in favour of the above processes that follow the spirit of informed consent; confidentiality and the right to withdraw that will be more suitable to the environment in which the research will take place.

While the majority of the research was to be conducted in Anonymous' online environments outlined above, those who consider themselves part of Anonymous attend physical protests and demonstrations at regular times throughout the year as well as attaching themselves to other protests on an ad-hoc basis. As Anonymous is not a centralised organisation, individuals and groups attend a wide spectrum of events, many of which are launched on relatively short notice, based on their own political beliefs and ideals. The only predictable event is Anonymous' own protest/demonstration on November 5th in central London, as described at the start of this chapter. Attending these would serve as a point of comparison between online and offline behaviour, as well as common motivations. Additionally this balancing of online and offline activity will go towards answering the research question relating to Anonymous' overall effectiveness – in terms of cohesion and accessibility of message to the wider public and interaction outside of their 'native' environment.

All of the above discussion of ethnographic research and its ethical issues is presented in the past tense. Like Anonymous themselves, this research had to adopt and shift around circumstances outside of itself in order to survive. In January 2014 Ben Quinn, a journalist for The Guardian, submitted a Freedom of Information request regarding how much money the government and particularly Ministry of Defence was spending to fund PhD research programmes into researching online behaviours and politics.<sup>9</sup> I had previously declined an

9 Ben Quinn, "Ministry of Defence funding research into online habits," *The Guardian*, posted January 7, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jan/07/ministry-defence-fund-research-online>

interview with Ben Quinn however the article contained a snippet of phrasing I had used in the application process; addressing the ‘known unknowns’ of Anonymous. This story spread to other news sites quoting elements of my initial research proposal verbatim such as the term ‘digital insurgency’ as well as the amount of funding I would be receiving<sup>10</sup>. Anonymous launched 'Operation PhD Pounds' in response, criticising government involvement in education and for wanting to get ‘inside’ Anonymous and launching an attack on the computer network systems of Queen Mary University a few weeks later, leaking network maps and personal information of students with threats for further action<sup>11</sup>.

I had received ethical approval to conduct the research as outlined above in December 2013, less than a month before Ben Quinn’s article in *The Guardian*. The fact that this research was being funded by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratories, a division of the Ministry of Defence, was the one key element I planned to obfuscate; explaining my position as a researcher at King’s College London either verbally or through disclosure documents/online information but not diverging the source of my funding as a necessary deception to ensure authentic data gathering as well as a personal safety measure. The revelation of MoD funding in British universities including King’s College London and the verbatim quoting of my research proposal meant that carrying out the research in its original form and with the original approach would have been untenable and personally dangerous. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, Anonymous have a history of disrupting the functionality of government/security service websites, finding and releasing the personal information of corporate CEOs and organising protests around the world. I was not prepared to go into their IRC servers or other websites and announce my affiliation to a university whose relationship with the Ministry of Defence had recently been made public because I would be the target of any retaliation from a group who are capable and more than willing to do so and also it would also increase the potential collateral risk for the university and the MoD.

10 RT, “UK MoD allocates millions for ‘digital insurgency’, social networking research,” RT.com, posted January 8, 2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/uk-defense-research-online-habits-312/>

11 Lorraine Murphy, “Why Anonymous is going to war with British higher education,” *The Daily Dot*, last updated December 11, 2015, <http://www.dailydot.com/news/anonymous-opphdpounds-uk-ministry-defense/>

I was aware at the time that such attention from Anonymous is typically short-lived; discussions with DSTL at the time were leaning towards releasing a statement or press release in response, however I objected strongly to this as it would only provide Anonymous with further ammunition and momentum for further attacks. As a result of these events and the subsequent conversations it became clear that, despite explicitly stating my intentions to do so, DSTL had not properly considered the implications of the research I was planning to carry out; that I would be talking to and engaging with a networked group who have and continue to engage in a range of extra-legal activities. Despite the initial intentions expressed to me that DSTL would be largely hands-off, providing research funding and delegating the ethical considerations to King's College, it was made clear to me that conducting covert research on Anonymous without approval from DSTL's own ethical approval body would be an unauthorised interception of communications data and therefore a breach of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

I submitted the relevant application to DSTL and, despite at least one in-person meeting and extended email conversations; I received no further communication from DSTL regarding the status of the application and was emphatically told that without such approval I was not technically allowed to use the internet to conduct research of any kind on this topic, despite having existing approval from King's College for the study as it had been originally conceived and outlined herein. I was told unofficially by someone from DSTL that such approval was a low priority given the combination of the upcoming National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review and general election in 2015. I was therefore not willing to either continue to wait for approval that may or may not come or conduct research which was technically and/or would put me/the university in danger. Considering the circumstances made the decision to drop the majority of the proposed fieldwork and ethnographic research in favour of an approach which meant the research could be carried out at all while at the same time taking a novel approach which connects the dots between several historical/political tangents surrounding Anonymous that haven't been considered in such detail in the existing literature. I would conduct a more up-to-date outlining of Anonymous' history in the aftermath of the collapse of LulzSec in 2011 while drawing on novel historical sources for comparison and analysis which are not seen in the field of 'Anonymous Studies'.

To do this I have drawn from sources which highlight Anonymous' reflection in the wider world as much as from Anonymous themselves; taking the form of contemporary media coverage of Anonymous' operations for the former and applicable Facebook, Twitter and YouTube content from Anonymous' most populous accounts/communication hubs for the same events. The reasoning for this approach is twofold. Firstly Anonymous is an ongoing and developing socio-cultural phenomenon, one which at the start of writing this thesis had been a vestigial shadow of its late 2000s self and over the course of 2012-2016 experienced a period of reinvigoration thanks to new world events and circumstances before sinking back into relative ignominy thanks to the structural, political and social flaws present in the identity of Anonymous since the beginning. A. J. P. Taylor describes one of the main problems of writing contemporary history as something that gets '...thicker as it approaches more recent times: more people, more events and more books written about them. More evidence is preserved, often, one is tempted to say, too much'<sup>12</sup>. This is particularly true for researching a self-identifying and decentralised network of activist individuals and cells whose collective pseudonym exists because and through the internet and the mass self-broadcast of information and ideas that online social media platforms facilitate.

The sheer mass of Anonymous-authored or Anonymous-identifying material being produced on a daily basis throughout this period means that it is impossible to provide a complete or authoritative position on Anonymous' day-to-day activities; there is too much and often little is preserved. It was my initial intention to document much of this day-to-day and even mundane activity as part of a digital ethnography of Anonymous. The above restrictions and unfortunate circumstances mean I have had to take a different approach, focussing on the sources and conversations produced during and in response to operations launched by Anonymous-identifying actors which received news media coverage; as will be discussed in chapters 7 and 8 Anonymous are most effective when their actions are generating press and social media feedback to maintain momentum and political relevance through attaching themselves to externally-driven events. As such it is during these events of concentrated effort and the resulting spotlights of media attention that we see can the outward persona of Anonymous through the creation of elaborate self-styled 'press releases' and a punk-like DIY approach to political lampooning and satire crossed with an audience-savvy awareness of

12 A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (London, 1975), 729.



pop-culture memes and tropes. This research will focus on this element of Anonymous, the way those operating the puppet-like mouthpieces of the Anonymous collective pseudonym interact with their targets, the wider media/public and each other.

The myriad branches and cells of Anons around the world adopt the Anonymous identity as an act of symbolism or a political statement<sup>13</sup>, as well as an attempt at personal cryptography when protesting in person or through systems of digital obfuscation such as TOR or a VPN network. However, while conducted through the artifice of usernames or wearing either the physical or digital masks of Anonymous, the personas visible through such public online interaction require a deliberately Barthesian<sup>14</sup> approach to understanding Anonymous rather than seeking to unpick their ‘true’ or ‘real’ nature. It is through the effects of Anonymous’ outward displays of flamboyant internet hyperbole that we can construct a better understanding of the Anonymous identity, a collective pseudonym which has been emergently constructed relative to its opponents and audience.

This in turn presents another methodological problem for contemporary history which is especially prescient for researching Anonymous, that ‘...the process of data gathering has to come to an end if a contemporary history project is ever going to be finished’<sup>15</sup>. For the purpose of this research the majority was done between early 2013 and mid-2016, with edits and corrections for events being added in as more information about them became available; the depth to which LulzSec had been infiltrated by the FBI came out half way through this period, turning initial analytical points into meandering conjecture in the face of court evidence and released materials in Hector ‘Sabu’ Monsegur’s trial, for example.

A further problem relative to this research is Anonymous’ inherent ephemerality, an issue which extends to the majority of the statements, images and videos produced through the Anonymous identity as a collective and voluntary pseudonym. As a decentralised and cellular network Anonymous has no universally agreed-upon news sources or political mouthpieces, however many Twitter accounts and Facebook groups may tautologically claim themselves to

13 Deseriis, Marco. “Improper names: Collective pseudonyms and multiple-use names as minor processes of subjectivation.” *Subjectivity* 5, no.2 (2012) 141.

14 Roland Barthes. "The Death of the Author." *Image / Music / Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. 147.

15 Martin Johnes, “On Writing Contemporary History,” *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 6 no.1 (2011), 21.

be so. Apart from a very small handful of materials such as the ‘Message to Scientology’ video which will be discussed in chapter 4 and LulzSec’s creative output which will be discussed in chapter 6, the majority of Anonymous-authored materials have and will probably never receive definitive author attribution. This is because, as discussed above, doing so would be in breach of the established anti-identity cultural norms which have grown through Anonymous’ 4chan/image board heritage and because many of these materials have ricocheted around the social media space for nearly a decade; being shared and re-hosted as a tool of social cohesion among an otherwise dislocated group and a method of political discourse. This is also a practical measure to ensure the longevity of such materials as websites and hosting services rise and fall in popularity and functionality.

Therefore many of the materials cited in this research will be from this strata of the collective memory of the internet; images, videos and other sources produced by individuals who personally and outwardly express themselves as part of the Anonymous pseudonym; a process which includes the forgoing of personally identifying themselves as the creators of their works and tautologically attributing them to Anonymous collectively. As will be discussed throughout this research, such a large-scale and uncontrolled use of a central identity for political actions<sup>16</sup> is not without its pitfalls.

Although not ultimately an ethnography in its finished form, this research aims to use some of the same principles for understanding and analysing Anonymous; particularly when considering the technical problems of determining the provenance of orphaned Anonymous-identifying sources or the impact of breaching cultural norms of anonymity and obfuscation, the intent being to ‘...sidestep questions of what identities really are and whether reality is really there, by shifting to...focus on how, where and when identities and realities are made available on the Internet.’<sup>17</sup> Tracing the source of comments through social media platforms such as Twitter is generally not impossible due to the stability of user-created pseudonyms or the use of their real names, however Anonymous’ gestation in an entropic and Darwinian environment such as 4chan and their use of ‘disposable’ IRC servers has, certainly in the ‘oldfags’ at the core of Anonymous’ foundation, generated a norm of rejecting this notion. In the interests of understanding Anonymous on their own terms this involves accepting the

16 Deseriis, 141.

17 Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, London, Sage Publications, 2001, 118.

tautological validity of primary sources whose authorship cannot be established. Although it will be impossible to gather every piece of publicised material, there is a sufficient volume and variety of sources that this is not an issue in terms of sourcing primary materials. The first source of data will include materials authored by Anonymous-identifying individuals as well as reports from the mainstream and technology media spaces covering Anonymous' activities as they happened; the reactive feedback loop Anonymous needs to conduct successful operations which also serves to define their collective identity.

This contemporary focus will be balanced through broader historical analysis which questions the relative novelty of Anonymous; their relationship with communication technologies, their use of such platforms as a political tool as well as the originality of many of the sentiments and grievances which have and continue to drive them forward. This research will look at the role of the printing press and individuals like Martin Luther and William Tyndale in disrupting the ecumenical authority of the church in the late medieval period. This research will also consider the technological and social upheaval of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and how many of its developments such as the electric telegraph and how the tangential role of Jeremy Bentham's life, actions and theory as well as legislation such as the Public Libraries Act of 1850 can be extrapolated to many of the issues which underpin the motivation and direction of activist politics today, not just limited to Anonymous.

## Literature Review

Across the interdisciplinary boundaries of politics, technology, philosophy and sociology sits the small but growing field of what I call 'Anonymous Studies'; a thread of research and analysis which stretches across all of these areas of study and applies their respective approaches to helping understand Anonymous from a particular perspective or consider an element of their dynamics not covered by the others. Although it is a niche subject it has continued to expand as, probably to their collective chagrin, Anonymous has become a more mainstream and popular subject, certainly in the aftermath of their 2008-2012 epoch. Their relative lack of activity or at least dilution of capability and direction since 2012 has provided a space for perspective and reflection upon Anonymous' history, actions and potential future. This field includes those studying Anonymous and other similar internet-facilitated political phenomena directly as well as some crossover from other fields applying their own methods and perspectives to Anonymous. Gabriella Coleman has conducted anthropological research on hacker culture and Anonymous for many years and is the most prolific source of academic writing on Anonymous; publishing a paper for the Centre for International Governance Innovation on Anonymous in 2013<sup>18</sup> and a book; 'Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous' in 2015<sup>19</sup>. She provides an in-depth historical narrative of Anonymous' genesis from within 4chan, explores the core philosophy of 'the lulz'; a highly capricious, mischievous and ultimately self-serving creed that drives actions because they are deemed to be collectively humorous which can also be turned towards more serious political aims<sup>20</sup>.

Coleman's work debunks much of Anonymous' tautological mystique, explaining from a fascinating personal position the course of the major epochs and turning points in their short but concentrated history. Coleman provides a historical framework to Anonymous' particular brand of prankster activism, citing groups throughout the twentieth century that have engaged in similar activities: 'The spirit of lulz is not particular to Anonymous, the Internet, trolling, or

18 Gabriella Coleman, "Anonymous in Context: The Politics and Power behind the Mask," *CIGI Online*, last modified September 23, 2013, <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/2013/9/anonymous-context-politics-and-power-behind-mask>.

19 Gabriella Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous* (United Kingdom: Verso Books, 2015)

20 Ibid, 30-33.

our times. The Dadaists<sup>21</sup> and Yippies<sup>22</sup> shared a similarly rowdy disposition, as did the Situationists<sup>23</sup> and Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers<sup>24</sup>...<sup>25</sup> This drawing upon art history and counter-cultural movements of the twentieth century highlights that much of what makes up the Anonymous identity is by no means new or totally original. What is new however is the speed at which these same types of actions can be carried out, and the scale and breadth of the available audiences. In an age where the equivalent Moore's Law<sup>26</sup> of communication speed seems to be reaching a similar plateau, decentralised networks such as Anonymous can carry out rapid, highly visible operations and propaganda campaigns that their targets are structurally incapable of reacting to at anything approaching the necessary speed or hierarchical reflexivity to counteract.

Freelance writer and media consultant Cole Stryker gives an excellent account of Anonymous in his book 'Epic Win for Anonymous: How 4chan's Army Conquered the Web'. In it he provides a comprehensive look at the state of the internet in 2003-2004, drawing from his own personal experience at the point in which the term 'Web 2.0' was becoming more widely used, as well as websites such as Facebook and MySpace which embodied this nebulous term's criteria of user-generated content and social interaction. This was the period when the website which Anonymous would grow within and emerge from, 4chan.org, was created too. This geographical map of relevant and important contemporary nodes of connectivity, content sharing and creation is very useful. In addition he provides a near-history background of the websites and networks that lead up to the Web 2.0 period. Stryker also provides an exhaustive account of the structure of 4chan, discussing how each sub-section of the website functions and how part of the community began to politicise into the Anonymous we know today.

21 Dadaism, a surrealist art movement that was part a reaction to the First World War and a protest against the systems which had led to it.

22 Tim Jordan and Paul A. Taylor, *Hactivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a cause?* (London: Routledge, 2004), 13.

23 Situationism was an artistic protest movement based on Guy Debord's Situationist politics, which will be discussed more in chapter 5.

24 1960s Anarchist group from New York, influence by Dadaism.

25 Gabriella Coleman, "Our Weirdness is Free," *Triple Canopy* issue 15, last modified February 19, 2012, [https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/15/contents/our\\_weirdness\\_is\\_free](https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/15/contents/our_weirdness_is_free).

26 Moore's Law states is an observation that computer hardware doubles in power and speed every year, and that eventually a peak will be reached at which point computers cannot become any faster.

Tim Jordan and Paul A. Taylor expand on this closer historical context in *Hactivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a cause?* Written when 4chan and its unique community was beginning to develop in 2004, it explores the near and farther histories of hacktivism as a concept. Their work examines the three principle ages of hacking; from the original hackers at MIT in the 1950s/60s, through the hardware hackers of the 1970s to the modern software hackers, exploring how as technology became cheaper and more available the focus on hacking changed from the fundamental mechanical workings of computers to their use and interaction with each other<sup>27</sup>. They also offer a critique of hacktivism from before Anonymous' inception which is equally applicable and resonates with the critiques made in this research; that it is locked within the commercially-produced technologies and systems it claims to rebel against<sup>28</sup> while being unable to escape from its own commodification and dilution<sup>29</sup>.

McKenzie Wark's seminal work *The Hacker Manifesto* is an interesting reinterpretation of Marxist theory, applying the concept of inter-class warfare through the modern context of information control. According to Wark power no longer lies in physical productive capacity but in the ability to control information and the methods of producing and reproducing its value<sup>30</sup>. Rather than defined along classes of wealth and physical ownership of land or money, Wark constructs this conflict between the 'hacker' and 'vectoralist' classes. The former creates new information flows as well as the associated technologies and platforms for personal edification rather than financial gain. This meta-class do not own the flows of information they produce; it is the 'vectoralist' class which directs these flows and reaps the financial benefits thereof<sup>31</sup> and is a construct which can be applied to Anonymous' early forays into attacking media/entertainment distribution companies and challenging copyright/IP systems due to the learned behaviours of their formative environment and times, as will be discussed more in the next two chapters.

27 Tim Jordan and Paul A. Taylor, *Hactivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a cause?* (London: Routledge, 2004), 10.

28 Ibid, 120.

29 Ibid, 82.

30 McKenzie Wark, "A Hacker Manifesto [version 4.0]," in *Anarchitexts: Voices from the Global Digital Resistance*, edited by Joanne Richardson (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 347.

31 McKenzie Wark, "Information Wants to be Free (But is Everywhere in Chains)," *Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2-3 (2006), 172.

Contrary to Coleman's position on Anonymous being a reactionary and reflexive movement, Swathi Padmanabhan places Anonymous exclusively within the context of cyber-terrorism; focussing on Anonymous' conduct of network disruption and DDOS attacks<sup>32</sup>. Other security-focussed approaches to Anonymous have attempted to model Anonymous' attacks using System Dynamics, a model which presumes that:

...every object or phenomenon can be treated as a system whose properties and behavior emerge from its underlying structure. This structure can be represented as a collection of interconnected nodes or, more specifically, stocks and flows...The crucial advantage of system dynamics is the inclusion of feedback loops which transform otherwise linear path of progression into a nonlinear, circular network of causes and effects without a clear beginning or an end. As a result of these internal interactions and causalities (positive or negative), the entire system can exhibit varying overall behavior on observed variables<sup>33</sup>.

These approaches offer a useful empirical perspective on an otherwise fluid and harlequin political actor such as Anonymous, while other perspectives have focussed on Anonymous' principle source of visual language and symbolism. Looking at the 1980s graphic novel and 2006 film *V for Vendetta*, Mandy Merck explores the film as part of a wider discussion on the benefits of anonymity to the field of celebrity studies<sup>34</sup>. Brian Ott discusses the 'visceral politics' of the film and how it 'invites viewers to reject a politics of apathy in favor of a politics of democratic struggle'<sup>35</sup>. Lewis Call takes an anarchist approach to the themes of the film and how they differ from the printed source material, discussing how the film presents the imagery of Guy Fawkes as a malleable symbol of political resistance and anti-establishment action<sup>36</sup>.

D.C. Elliott discusses the implications of Anonymous' 'Project Chanology', a decentralised yet simultaneous global protest against the Church of Scientology in 2008 that baffled and surprised the world's media through a 'unique, bizarre experiment in political resistance and

32 Swathi Padmanabhan, "Hacking for Lulz: Employing Expert Hackers to Combat Cyber Terrorism," *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment & Technology Law* 15, no.1 (2012).

33 Jakub Drmola, Martin Bastl and Miroslav Mares, "Modelling Hacktivism using System Dynamics," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 10, no.2 (2015).

34 Mandy Merck, "Masked Men: Hacktivism, Celebrity and Anonymity", *Celebrity Studies* 6, no. 3, (2015).

35 Brian L. Ott, "The Visceral Politics of *V for Vendetta*: On Political Affect in Cinema," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 1 (2010): 47.

36 Lewis Call, "A is for Anarchy, V is for Vendetta: Images of Guy Fawkes and the Creation of Postmodern Anarchism," *Anarchist Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008).

global participation'<sup>37</sup>, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. He then gives a brief overview of Anonymous' history, highlighting that it wasn't until early 2008 when the Church of Scientology litigious reaction to a video posted around the internet of Tom Cruise speaking about what it means to be a Scientologist. The Church subsequently threatened YouTube and other video hosting sites with lawsuits and take-down notices. It was this attempted censoring of information that brought Anonymous as a political movement together in what Elliott describes as something:

the world simply hadn't seen before – a global announcement on behalf of a global organisation with no leaders, no membership, no borders, and no means of identification. Anonymous didn't seem to exist – except as a construct in the minds of the audience who saw its films and images.<sup>38</sup>

Coleman discusses similar ideas to Elliott's work regarding Anonymous' lack of membership or hierarchy. Indeed, while there is no official hierarchy and structure, outside the core group of server administrators, skilled hackers and prominent video makers/publishers there are:

...myriad sympathizers who may not spend hours in chat rooms but will heed commands to participate in DDOS<sup>39</sup> attacks and repost messages sent by Anonymous Twitter accounts, acting as both mercenary army and street team.<sup>40</sup>

In a social community where identity is fluid and variable this hierarchy of skill supersedes the positioning of Anonymous participants through status or other ephemeral criteria as we see in the 'real world'.

Writer and software engineer David Auerbach offers an extensive treatise and a number of case studies relating to the socio-cultural conventions of what he calls 'A-culture'<sup>41</sup>, a term he links to the early days of *Otaku* culture in the early 1990s. *Otaku* was a negative label originally applied to those seen as socially inept or 'shut-in' in Japanese society. This causal link continues through connecting *Otaku* culture with the increasing proliferation and accessibility of the internet from the same period. Auerbach's work draws attention to how

37 D. C. Elliott, "Anonymous Rising," *Linq (Literature in North Queensland)* 36, no. 1 (2009): 96.

38 Ibid., 100.

39 A Distributed Denial of Service attacks uses connections from many computers to overload the target server with access requests, enough to slow its service for legitimate users or knock it offline completely.

40 Coleman, "Our Weirdness is Free".

41 David Auerbach, "Anonymity as Culture: Treatise," *Triple Canopy* issue 15, last modified February 19, 2012, <http://canopycanopycanopy.com/15>.



little focus has been on A-culture's communication medium and structure, highlighting the innovative framework of a mass unrecorded written discussion by participants who are not known to each other. The high speed of conversations on 4chan means that each participant must continually reassert and reiterate contributions to maintain their position among the shifting linguistic, behavioural and social trends.

Under these social conventions there is no topic that is immune from ridicule or parody, although Auerbach doesn't explicitly mention that Anonymous makes use of this characteristic as a tactic in their approach to dealing with their opponents. This reverse engineering of media content serves to utterly baffle their detractors. Any insults they receive are often turned around and wielded as badges of pride or as new labels of identification. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this can be seen in the case of the Los Angeles Fox-affiliated TV station KTTV, who in July 2007 presented a news report which labelled Anonymous as 'hackers on steroids', an 'internet hate machine' and 'domestic terrorists' (accompanied by footage of an exploding van)<sup>42</sup>. The pejorative overtones of the first two terms were neutralised through Anonymous' adoption of them as labels of self-identification, a process visible throughout Anonymous' history until their visual and symbolic language had solidified through the 2008 anti-Scientology protests.

Forbes Magazine journalist Parmy Olson explores the inner workings of a small yet very important element of Anonymous in her book 'We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous, and the Global Cyber Insurgency'. She focuses on LulzSec; the splinter group which took on the world's internet security giants in a 50-day spree of website breaches, take-downs and data extraction in 2011, as well as their subsequent infiltration, arrests and the subsequent political and organisational fallout<sup>43</sup>. Olson corroborates much of Coleman's own analysis from different viewpoints. Her work, along with Coleman and Stryker provide a reliable coverage of the internal workings of many of Anonymous' key events and moments in their history; cataloguing and preserving snapshots of events as they happened. Many of these events exist now only as frozen chat-logs that have been copied over and over again, the individuals responsible now existing only as monikers and aliases.

42 "Exploding Van." *Know Your Meme*. Last modified 2014, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/exploding-van>.

43 Parmy Olson, *We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous and the Global Cyber Insurgency* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2013).

As an almost entirely internet-based actor Anonymous uses a wide range of visual and literary mediums as political communication tools and sources of social capital. This means there is a large amount of Anonymous-authored material to draw from throughout their history.

However the internet has a paradoxically long and short-term memory at the same time. The amount of material preserved for posterity is eclipsed by the amount that has either been lost or was never recorded in the first place. In addition to the previously-mentioned books by Olson and Coleman, a book attributed to the Anonymous identity itself provides an equally useful in-road.

In 2013 The Imaginary Book Company<sup>44</sup> released what it claimed was the final stage in a process of the preservation of an 'imaginary non-organisation, to preserve it as a time-capsule for the future'<sup>45</sup>. This book contains over 200 pages of written essays and images that were supposedly submitted and collected from those who identify with Anonymous. These essays discuss a wide range of political topics, many of which are immediately relatable to the central themes of the critiques of 1960s consumer society by Guy Debord and Theodor Adorno:

They would have us bound to the rocks of our despair and accepted futility, to a modern ennui and idleness. They would have us purchase and nurse our own hungry, preying birds, and offer up gladly our writhing wounds and gasping organs, to revel in the tearing of flesh, to reveal in our own destruction...We have often bartered an acquiescence of self for the promise of momentary relief offered by their corrosive goods<sup>46</sup>.

The reigning economic system is founded on isolation; at the same time it is a circular process designed to produce isolation. Isolation underpins technology, and technology isolates in its turn; all goods proposed by the spectacular system, from cars to televisions, also serve as weapons for that system as it strives to reinforce the isolation of "the lonely crowd."<sup>47</sup>

These critiques are from half a century ago, yet their arguments and criticisms of an increasingly connected yet alienated society driven to solitude by the very systems which

44 At least this is what the introduction to the book claims – at the time of writing the Company's website has been down for some time.

45 "Book – Anonymous by Anonymous", *FreeAnons*, accessed May 10, 2014, <https://freeanons.org/book-anonymous-by-anonymous/>.

46 *The Anonymous Book* (The Imaginary Book Co., 2013), 27.

47 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 22.

claim to offer this connectivity is a common critique visible in Anonymous-authored materials today. This will be explored more in chapter 5 as part of the discussion of Anonymous' use of popular culture and how popular culture has in turn used Anonymous.

As mentioned at the start of this review any study of Anonymous can draw on broad range of tangential theoretical and analytical disciplines. As with Anonymous themselves, it would be impossible or at least highly impractical to outline every single precedent or crossover point in the existing literature, so instead this review will consider a some of the fields which are important for establishing a conceptual base to consider throughout the rest of this research.

The literary field which grew around the rise in frequency and scale of mass protests and direct action contains many useful crossover points for understanding Anonymous' own physical protests such as the Million Mask Marches but also as insight into the mind-set and political processes which enable them. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani's 'Social Movements: An Introduction' explores the fluid and reiterative nature of identity relative to one's political disposition, a tool of categorising an 'other' to protest against [p.92-94]<sup>48</sup>. They further elaborate on the dehumanising nature of computer-mediated communications as a weakness for social movements due to the lack of face-to-face social relations which typically enable a social movement to grow<sup>49</sup>.

Anastasia Kavada has written extensively on the politics of mass protest movements, in particular the Occupy movement which itself had a number of crossovers with Anonymous during the peak of their activity. She, like Della Porta and Diani draw on Alberto Melucci's work into the concept of identity as a facet of collective action in the age of information and mass communication<sup>50</sup>. She also explores some of the weaknesses of Occupy's open approach to participatory democracy which are equally applicable to Anonymous, that the absolute openness meant that any deliberation or action was slowed due to the '...mixed political experience of those involved.'<sup>51</sup> She goes on to discuss the highly relevant concept of ventriloquism in relation to protest movements, that '...the individual activists bringing to life

48 Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 92-94.

49 Della Porta and Diani, 133.

50 Anastasia Kavada, "Creating the collective: social media, the Occupy Movement and its constitution as a collective actor," *Information, Communication and Society*, 18, no. 8 (2015), 875.

51 Ibid, 880.

the collective voice take both the role of ventriloquist and that of the dummy. This is because claiming to speak on behalf of a group signals that we are attached to it and we are thus equally animated...'<sup>52</sup>, a concept which will be discussed in more detail in chapters 5 and 8.

Starr, Fernandez and Scholl consider the other side of protests and direct action movements, looking at the state and corporate response to marches and protests can be understood from a Foucauldian perspective; that the construction of large barriers and the funnelling of protesters through or out of certain areas an example of 'technologies of control' in action<sup>53</sup> as well as Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialisation through the re-taking of physical space by the authorities and the regulation/managing of dissent to disperse its energy in a safe and controlled way<sup>54</sup>.

This is a technique which will be explored further in relation to Anonymous' protests in chapter 7 which will also draw on Foucault's work 'Discipline and Punish – The Birth of the Prison'<sup>55</sup> in understanding the legal/judicial system as a means of managing delinquency and inoculating society against replicable and acceptable crimes. This concept is highly prescient considering the extensive prison sentences handed out to LulzSec, Jeremy Hammond, Aaron Schwartz and other Anons which have been motivating factors for several large-scale retaliatory operations.

David Graeber's ethnographic study of direct action/Anarchist movements explores some of the broader historical and political trends behind the emergence of direct action movements in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, political and economic shifts which can be seen as more latent motivation for the indignation and outrage which drives Anonymous and others to engage in mass disruptive and illegal action. Graeber talks about the inversion of left/right wing politics after the end of the Cold War which produced right-wing free-market utopianism<sup>56</sup> and the lie of globalisation which prioritised the mobility of finance capital at the expense of the majority of the world's population<sup>57</sup>, a system of unfairness and financial/moral/political duplicity

52 Ibid, 881.

53 Amory Starr, Luis Fernandez and Christian Scholl, *Shutting Down the Streets: Political Violence and Social Control in the Global Era*, (United States of America: NYU Press, 2011), 6-7.

54 Ibid, 47.

55 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995).

56 David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, (Oakland:AK Press, 2009), ix.

57 Ibid, xi.

which is at the heart of anti-globalisation movements and is a common theme in much of Anonymous' own PR materials and statements. The main body of his ethnography explores the dynamics of groups like the Italian American protest group Ya Basta! who conducted actions which, like Anonymous, were '....simultaneously profoundly foolish and utterly serious.'<sup>58</sup> He goes on to discuss how events like the Battle of Seattle were media spectacles created to act as fulcrums of public opinion<sup>59</sup> years before Anonymous took such methods on board themselves, as well as how such attempts to marshal the mainstream broadcast media are difficult to reconcile with its inherent biases in favour of established 'legitimate' debate or profit-driven editorial focus<sup>60</sup>.

As well as the analogous political relevance of the field of protest literature to Anonymous and its many points of crossover, there is a further body of equally interesting and relevant work which explores some of the more ephemeral links between mass communications technology, culture and their impact on our society as well as on us as individuals. Alexander Galloway both talk about the changing nature of human interaction with communications technology in 'The Interface Effect', discussing concepts such as 'presentness', a term he talks about relative to painting and art but is equally applicable to Anonymous; that their world of mashed-up pop culture artefacts and internet memes is:

...[the world of the image is] present to us, but we were never present to it. So it is nearness with a catch...it is a desire to be brought near, but one already afflicted with a specific neurosis, that of the rejection of the self. With each attempt to array the world in proximal relation to us, we must at the same time make ourselves disappear.<sup>61</sup>

Galloway further draws on sources such as the relationship between poets and their position as deliverers of 'divine expression'<sup>62</sup>, that they are merely conduits of bigger and more sublime ideas. This, combined with the above analysis of visual (and especially computer-mediated) communication necessitates the eradication of the self which in turn combined with the broader cultural neuroses and resistance to an unfair and increasingly isolated social environment can be of great help in understanding how and why a networked protest non-identity such as Anonymous developed when and where it did, a process which will be

58 Ibid, 8.

59 Ibid, 208.

60 Ibid, 444-445, 452.

61 Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (UK: Polity Press, 2012), 10.

62 Galloway, 32.

discussed in more detail throughout this research.

Yochai Benkler's 'The Wealth of Networks' discusses many of these themes, the political production of counter-culture media<sup>63</sup> and assessing the validity of some of the widespread claims/critiques regarding the apparent democratising of the internet [p.235]<sup>64</sup>, all of which provide useful contextual depth for the analysis of Anonymous herein. Furthermore James Gleick, Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, John Thompson and Elizabeth Eisenstein have written extensively on the history and development of mass communications technologies as well as the historical/contemporary socio-political relationship we have with 'the media' since the rise of moveable type printing; a period relevant to Anonymous' own developmental relationship which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

There are two common themes which repeat themselves throughout these literary crossover points for discussing and analysing Anonymous; the fluid nature of identity in a digitally-connected social environment and the resistance against externally-dictated authority and/or systems of personal, political or intellectual control. In the same way that Anonymous' own statements, actions and contexts can be explored through historical comparison, we can take a wider view of sources and theoretical bodies to gain a better understanding of Anonymous through the fields of Post-Structuralism and Anarchism.

Post-structuralism is a theoretical basis for questioning the relationships between people and the processes of creating and reproducing meaning and narratives as frameworks to understand the world around us and to create our respective realities. Born out of the linguistic or self-styled field of Semiotics of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, it is a field as contradictory and convoluted as the group this paper analyses through it. Post-structuralism is concerned with the relationship between people and the reproduction of meaning; that ideas are result effects of meanings and narratives that we have learned and reproduced from power and information relationships and structures that came before us. It is the questioning of this interplay between the creation and maintenance of narrative and information power relationships that makes the field of Post-structuralism so useful to

63 Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 277.

64 Ibid, 235.

discussing and understanding the inherent political actors and movements that have emerged from fundamentally post-structural environments like the internet. Additionally, it is useful to help understand the relationship between those who wish to subvert these structures of narrative control and the historical developments of communications technology.

Roland Barthes writes that the attribution of an Author to a text imposes limits upon it. In this sense we can see Anonymous in their actualised political context as a floating signifier; free and open to interpretation based on the individual who self-identifies as Anonymous, not limited by geographic, linguistic or political boundaries. In this way the Guy Fawkes mask and even the name of Anonymous stand as a mirror to the hierarchical narrative structures that, according to Post-Structuralist and Anarchist theory. Structures which dictate the nature of reality to those without the information narrative advantage; inviting the onlooker to ascribe their own identity or meaning to and through such symbols of near-universal dissent; a form of digital agnosticism against Barthes' 'author-God'.

The field of Post-structuralism has theoretical crossover with Anarchism, a political mind-set that is equally as fractured and contradictory. Anarchism is relevant and important to the discussion of Anonymous for several reasons. Firstly many of Anonymous' rhetorical visual and printed materials contain anti-authoritarian, revolutionary and counter-narrative sentiments. Secondly it is relevant in relation to the historical discussion of communication technology and counter-narrative actors; anarchist theorists like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon whose work is critical of the sovereign rights of the property aspects of Roman Law, that property or land can only legitimately possessed or owned through genuine use or occupation<sup>65</sup>. Individualist An-archist Max Stirner was writing around the same time as Proudhon in the mid-19th century and, according to Saul Newman, overlaps with and to some extent precedes post-structuralism; particularly when discussing the role and function of the power of the state and our understanding of knowledge. Stirner published 'The Ego and Its Own' in 1844, in which he discusses the concept of the 'Union of Egoists', a group of individuals who operate together as a means of perpetuating and fulfilling their self-interest only so far as this process is met. Stirner was very much against the idea of the 'party', a political construct of enforced consensus that is the opposite and enemy of the egoist:

65 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What Is Property?: or, An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (Humboldt Publishing Company, 1890).



In the very act of joining them and entering their circle one forms a union with them that lasts as long as party and I pursue one and the same goal. But today I still share the party's tendency, as by tomorrow I can do so no longer and I become 'untrue' to it. The party has nothing binding (obligatory) for me, and I do not have respect for it; if it no longer pleases me, I become its foe...So then an egoist could never embrace a party or take up with a party? Oh, yes, only he cannot let himself be embraced and taken up by the party. For him the party remains all the time nothing but a gathering: he is one of the party, he takes part.<sup>66</sup>

This resistance to adhering to the state-within-a-state of the 'party' is a long-running and core element of the concept of collective politics that underpins the Anonymous identity; that of eschewing formal structures of affiliation and resisting the narrative underpinnings of state and party-based political structures as a protest against such codifying systems of control and oppressive management of the individual.

Throughout Anonymous' history these events have a common thread of motivation and political positioning from the global protests against the Church of Scientology, against the freezing of Wikileaks' funding, the hacking of HBGary Federal to ISIS and the vast majority of popular operations in between. All of these actions did not come from an internally mandated or predetermined manifesto, but as a reaction to external events; responding and retaliating to them, typically once said events have become popular/widespread enough for the sufficient level of traction both within and outside Anonymous' constituency. This reactionary underpinning of Anonymous' methods and structure exposes how the singularity functions and has always functioned and self-organised according to a political model which we can examine through Nietzsche's critique of Anarchist theory, that of Ressentiment. Originally coined by Kierkegaard who described its effect on the individual as a 'vast prison formed by the reflection of those around him', Nietzsche describes Ressentiment as a process of absorbing and re-defining the frameworks of morality, establishing those without power or agency as truly good or noble. This moral framework is inherently reactionary and requires some form of opposition and/or an external stimulus to function and grow. This reactionary approach fosters an inherent hatred of those with power and of power itself, a hatred that comes from the process of continuously defining and comparing itself to what it is not.<sup>67</sup> The major fallacy with Ressentiment as a political position is that the taking of 'imaginary revenge' requires a target or enemy, without whom such campaign would have no meaning relative to

66 Max Stirner, *The Ego and its Own* (New York City, Benjamin R. Tucker, 1904), 183.

67 Saul Newman, *Anarchism and the Politics of Ressentiment* (The Anarchist Library, Anti-copyright, 2011), 4.



it. This therefore requires and validates the continued existence of such a nemesis to continue to reinforce their position as 'good' in opposition to 'evil'. This deconstruction of what Nietzsche considers a body of political theory based on weakness and of glorifying suffering can in turn be used to help understand Anonymous as a political actor.

Nietzsche's position on the role of the state shares much with the most common basic principles of Anarchist theory; individuals are tamed and herded by the state, a fundamentally artificial structure of domination created deliberately and consciously to serve this purpose. In this capacity Nietzsche rejects the Hobbesian narrative of the social contract between individuals and the state as heavily biased towards the interests of the latter. Nietzsche disagrees with the artificially created laws of the state and ruling structures yet also rejects the notion of inherent, natural laws which underpin the idea that human beings are fundamentally co-operative and operate perfectly well without the need for intervening control structures imposed upon them, the latter serving as the basis for much of Anarchist theory. Newman argues that both Anarchism and political culture in general operate on a Manichean and essentialist framework and that in this interplay between natural and state laws Anarchism has fallen into the same reductionist trap; essentialising the state in the same way that Marxism essentialised the economy as the cause of all ills in society.<sup>68</sup> Newman considers this as a valid extension of Nietzschean Ressentiment; whereby the individual subject is only moral and rational through his or her existence contrary to the control narratives and structures of the state, which are irrational and immoral in their very existence. These systems must be overthrown to achieve an ultimate victory by what Newman calls the 'essentialist human subject, the pure subject of resistance' creating and sustaining an arrangement that requires the continuing existence and relative positions of both the state and the revolutionary; a symbiosis of reflexive power relationships defined by outward classification of an external nemesis.

68 Newman (2011), 9.

## Chapter Overview

### Chapter 2 – From 4chan to Political Mobilisation

This chapter will begin charting Anonymous' history, starting with an exploration of their formative environment on the technologically and socially expanding internet of the early 2000s and the image-board website 4chan.org in particular. This will involve a detailed exploration of 4chan's social systems and structures which promoted the shedding of personal ego and sensibilities through anonymity; one of the underlying factors behind why this particular internet community, out of many that were developing at the time, engaged in a campaign of online harassment which grew throughout the mid-2000s into a politicised flash-mob. This more aggressive pre-'Anonymous' vanguard was able to appear and disappear at will and to the chagrin of their targets' outdated and mismatched countermeasures. From mid-2006 to the end of 2007 the hard edge of 4chan's community became aware of their collective capability and escalated the scale and spectacle of their attacks; feeding off of the morbidly fascinated mainstream media feedback loop, forging their own identity as the bogeymen of the internet.

### Chapter 3 – The Connected Society

This chapter will explore the historical and technological context of communication technologies either as tools of political/control narrative subversion across the last 500 years or as useful comparative analogues to our own experience of the always-online society we live in today; from the use of moveable type printing as a means to destabilise the Church's authority and construction of reality to considering the similarities between the legal and ethical debates over the Public Libraries Act of 1850 and Facebook's myriad programmes of free but content-restricted internet access in developing online consumer markets. This chapter will explore the idea of emergent, decentralised networked movements like Anonymous as a recent example of the constant tension between communications technologies, ruling institutions of society and the populations whose lives are controlled or structured by them. It will also consider the importance and providence of associated issues such as the development of the concept of copyright as a method of information control; a conceptual argument at the core of many of Anonymous beliefs forged in the 'wild west' period of the Internet's history.

#### Chapter 4 – Project Chanology and Payback

This chapter picks up the exploration and examination of Anonymous' history, beginning with their first major flashpoint public campaign against the Church of Scientology in early 2008; an inevitable galvanisation of 4chan's increasing militancy and audaciousness which snowballed into a global protest event from a single anonymous post. This chapter will explore the reasons for Project Chanology, its progress and inevitable decline. From this point on Anonymous' fortunes were determined by the serendipitous timing of an expanding portfolio of external world events and political controversies which kept Anonymous active and alive. This chain of events goes from responding to the alleged illegal activities carried out by the entertainment industries, the freezing of Wikileaks' financial systems and the early events of the Arab Spring in 2011, from which LulzSec, one of Anonymous' most notorious hacker cells and the cause of their most grievous undoing would emerge. This chapter will also briefly discuss some of the tools used by Anonymous including examples of deployment as well as the political and judicial impact of their inherent flaws.

#### Chapter 5 – Anonymous and the Re-wiring of Pop-Culture Imagery

This chapter will examine Anonymous' use of and relationship to popular culture, looking at how they have efficiently used its imagery and language for their own political aims; beginning by examining the genus of Anonymous' iconography of self-identification and its differences to the pop-culture avatar of the Guy Fawkes mask from V for Vendetta adopted after Project Chanology. This will involve exploring how the Anonymous identity grew out of a media-rich environment where such hijacking or appropriation was also a form of social currency among an anonymised community. From here this chapter will explore the history of the Guy Fawkes mask as an anti-establishment meme since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, its contemporary history through its use in popular culture and how it became the de-facto outward visage of Anonymous. This chapter will then consider the theories of Guy Debord and Theodor Adorno regarding the commercialisation and sanitisation of political imagery and how Anonymous have reversed these processes. Finally this chapter will consider how the ideas, language and imagery of Anonymous have in turn been appropriated as pop-culture symbols by the entertainment industries through advertising, films and videogames.

## Chapter 6 – Serious Business and the end of the Lulz

This chapter will chart and explore Anonymous' rapid expansion and most dramatic fall from the beginning of 2011 until 2016. During this a small group of technically-skilled individuals calling themselves LulzSec broke Anonymous' reactive cycle and launched attacks on their own initiative which revitalised interest and enthusiasm but also indirectly caused the longest period of disillusionment and lack of focus following their dramatic and Icarian downfall. The ramifications of LulzSec's actions and the revelations of their infiltration/coercion removed Anonymous' sense of invincibility, resulting in a noticeably more parasitic approach to operations and organisation; attaching themselves to existing campaigns against 'softer' targets. This chapter will explore events which were concurrent to LulzSec such as the near-destruction of US federal defence contractor HB Gary and Anonymous' questionable involvement in one of the largest data breaches in history. Finally this chapter will look at how, even if Anonymous themselves are no longer the serious threat they were in their heyday, their language, imagery and methods have become a tactical template for hacker groups around the world.

## Chapter 7 – The Other Side of the Mask

This chapter will look at some of the legal and political ramifications of Anonymous' actions. This will include whether Anonymous can be classified as an insurgent political movement. This chapter will examine the legal response to Anonymous' actions, looking at the arrest and sentencing of people arrested for the actions as part of Anonymous. This will include returning to the 19<sup>th</sup> century to consider the relevance of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon prison design as well as aspects of his own life and death which are relevant to understanding Anonymous today. This chapter will consider the physical response to Anonymous' 'real life' actions by examining the police response to the 'Million Mask March' protests on November 5 and how it has changed from 2012-2015. Finally this chapter will look at how the broader image-based culture of the internet has reacted to Anonymous, looking at how Anonymous have been subjected to the same processes of deconstruction satire and cynical parody which facilitated their development in the first place. This will include an examination of accusations of collusion and being 'part of the system'; how Anonymous have become trapped in their own hyperbolic and conspiratorial language and criticised in the same manner.

## Chapter 8 – Is the legion worth expecting?

Anonymous did not grow in a vacuum, and as such this chapter will place Anonymous within the wider context of other digital rights activist/lobbyist groups, political parties and radical individual whistle-blowers. This will examine Anonymous' effectiveness and capability compared to these more conventionally politically integrated and understandable organisations such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation and Pirate Parties, as well as to more radical and damaging leaks such as Edward Snowden, Julian Assange and the Panama Papers. The Pirate Party movement is gaining political ground across Europe and is becoming a genuine political contender for government in Iceland. Lobby groups like the Electronic Frontier Foundation lobby for digital rights through legal aid and publicised research. On the other axis of the narrative contest for our digital reality the revelations from whistle-blowers such as Snowden, Manning and Assange, coupled with leaks and publications such as the Panama Papers have had a longer and more sustained effect in opening up the debates and issues that many of the activists who consider themselves Anonymous campaign for. This chapter will also examine the decline of Anonymous post-LulzSec in more detail, as well as Anonymous' resurgence of activity as a reaction to ISIS' social media presence.

## Chapter 9 – Conclusion

This chapter will bring the above discussions together to provide concluding thoughts on the research questions; where did Anonymous come from and how did they develop into a political activist identity and where Anonymous fits in the wider spectrum of contemporary digital politics. This chapter will, in addition to presenting the concluding/final points for this thesis, propose suggestions for future research based on the findings of this research. There are many other analogous groups similar to Anonymous who are equally worthy of historical research and placement in the contemporary spectra of information politics and online activism. Other research has taken a more ethnographic approach to Anonymous Studies, however Anonymous' existence and as a tautological and obfuscated identity means that it is impossible to conclusively represent or accurately depict Anonymous through a small sub-set of an element of its constituency. Furthermore the Anonymous identity has changed and continues to change at the rapid pace of digital and exponential human communication; this unrelenting pace means that the values and common goals of those participating in and identifying as Anonymous from just a few years ago are radically different to those today.

This constant metamorphosis means that ‘fresh’ research of this type is needed at regular intervals to create as accurate a picture of Anonymous as possible; contributing to our understanding of how the internet has affected and guided our political relationship with it as a communications platform/medium and with each other. Finally this chapter will offer some concluding thoughts and some points of summation about what Anonymous is, what purpose it serves to those who adopt it as a shared pseudonym as well as offering some future avenues of research.

## Chapter Two – From 4chan to Political Mobilisation

The internet has given us the ability to instantly and exponentially communicate with each other around the world. This communication is at least notionally free from the restrictions of print media, radio or television. Our relationship with the internet is fundamentally different to our relationship with these other mediums. Rather than a singular source broadcasting to a much larger passive audience, the internet enables us to be broadcasters, the audience or both. This structure enables human communication at speeds unparalleled by any other communications technology. From conferences and royal weddings to wars and revolutions, events around the world can be watched live and discussed in real time among physically disconnected audiences.

This speed of information has changed our perception of time on the internet. The age, and crucially relevance, of the flow of conversations and the informational currents of social media hubs are measured in hours or minutes; information more than a couple of days old decays into obsolescence and digital antiquity. It is only search engines, social media meta-data and private or governmental data-gathering infrastructure which plumbs this digital scrap-heap full of stories, controversies and conversations which are remembered by automated machines rather than by the people who created them. In this environment as we know it today, telling the history of Anonymous is akin to an archaeological excavation of the internet, an excavation which faces all the problems of digital decay and the fluidity of author attribution which hampers online research as discussed in the previous chapter.

In order to understand Anonymous it is necessary to unpick their origins and formative environment and how they established the social conventions and political characteristics visible in Anonymous throughout their history to the present day. Even in its early stages the reactionary mechanisms which underpin the Anonymous identity solidified and drove the rhetorical/ideological positioning of those associating with Anonymous and their shared political characteristics. Encapsulating this is Anonymous' gestation on the Internet rather than from a particular ethnic/religious culture, or from a geographically defined community driven by a single unifying and reinforce able cause; a constructional fallacy which, as will be discussed throughout this thesis, became a fundamental and irrevocable weakness.

This chapter will examine the first developmental stages of the Anonymous identity; how a portion of the community of a single website, 4chan.org, changed from a loose-knit community of capricious trolls in the early 2000s into a feared political network of hacker-activists by the end of the decade. This will include discussing the social characteristics of this online community as a cultural nexus around which the Anonymous identity took shape. 4chan's flexible approach to anonymity and identity provided a space in which the Anonymous identity could develop; a very different process from the other social media hubs emerging around the same early to mid-2000s period such as Facebook and MySpace. Exploring the differences between 4chan and the other social networks developing at the same time is a necessary step to help understand the socio-cultural conditions that allowed the idea of Anonymous as a political actor to develop, as well as how it became the tautological franchise for activism and protest around the world that we know it as today. Once the necessary groundwork has been laid this chapter will explore Anonymous' history from the creation of 4chan up to the breakthrough moment which aligned the proto-Anonymous constituency and propelled the Anonymous identity into the public sphere for the first time; the simultaneous worldwide protests against the Church of Scientology in early 2008.

#### 4chan and /b/

It is impossible to attribute the creation of an emergent and tautological phenomenon such as Anonymous to any individuals in particular<sup>69</sup>. It is, however, easy to identify their formative environment and its architect. This environment is the image-board website 4chan.org and the architect is Christopher Poole who is known more by his internet pseudonym 'moot'. Given the reputation 4chan garnered over its history and it's not entirely undeserved notoriety as one of the most offensive websites on the Internet, Poole managed to keep his personal and internet lives separate for six years after 4chan's creation, his actual identity only coming to light in 2009<sup>70</sup>. Poole's motivations for creating 4chan were remarkably unremarkable given the site's eventual internet infamy and importance as the environment from which the Anonymous identity would emerge. In 2003 a teenage Poole was an active member of the internet forum somethingawful.com<sup>71</sup>. He was a prolific contributor and discussant in

69 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower Spy*, 16.

70 Jamin Brophy-Warren, "Modest Web Site is Behind a Bevy of Memes," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 9, 2008, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121564928060441097>.

71 Whitney Phillips, "The House That Fox Built: Anonymous, Spectacle and Cycles of Amplification," *Television and New Media* 14, no. 6 (2013): 502-503.



somethingawful's forums for discussing Japanese popular culture; animated TV series/films as well as comics.

Poole was looking for a website or service to store the large number of images and other resources that he and the other members of somethingawful posted, shared and referred to during discussions. Poole was a regular visitor to the Japanese image-board website 2channel also known as 2chan, which Poole and his friends sourced many of their images and information from. 2chan was created in 1999 by Hiroyuki Nishimura while he was on an exchange visit to the University of Central Arkansas<sup>72</sup>. He created the site as an outlet for Japanese people to communicate openly and free from the strict rules of behaviour and decorum which are adhered to across many layers of Japanese society. This freedom was facilitated by allowing 2chan users to post content and discuss topics without having to go through any of the hoops of account registration, adopting user names or providing contact information or other metrics of verification<sup>73</sup>. Hiroyuki and Poole express similar ideological perspectives which underpin their respective online communities. Both express the importance of anonymity, the need for flat and decentralised discussion and the positive effects of a flexible approach to identity in discussion and debate, all of which are even more important when this discussion is taking place through the internet. When asked about 2chan and the allegations that it was a spawning ground for libel in a 2003 interview Hiroyuki responded that:

...delivering news without taking any risk is very important to us. There is a lot of information disclosure or secret news gathered on Channel 2. Few people would post that kind of information by taking a risk. Moreover, people can only truly discuss something when they don't know each other<sup>74</sup>.

At a 2009 conference Poole made the same argument in favour of this platform for anonymised free speech in a singular statement:

People deserve a place to be wrong<sup>75</sup>.

72 Lisa Katayama, "Meet Hiroyuki Nishimura, the Bad Boy of the Japanese Internet," *Wired*, May 19, 2008, <http://www.wired.com/2008/05/mf-hiroyuki/>.

73 Ibid.

74 "Looking for the Law in Online Japan's Wild West," *Online Journalism Review*, February 2, 2006, <http://www.ojr.org/060202hornyak/>.

75 Julian Dibbell, "Radical Opacity," *MIT Technology Review*, August 23, 2010,

The use of 2chan as a source of Japanese pop culture by Poole and his friends was curtailed when at an unknown point during 2003 the site implemented a block on all non-Japanese IP addresses from accessing it. This was probably done to save money on hosting costs and/or to stop an increasing number of foreigners like Poole and his friends from visiting the site. Poole decided to create an American/English language version of 2chan himself. He used his mother's credit card to rent server space and launched 4chan on October 1 2003<sup>76</sup>. From the main home-page visiting users pick a board devoted to a particular topic:

### What is 4chan?

4chan is a simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images. There are boards dedicated to a variety of topics, from Japanese animation and culture to videogames, music, and photography. Users do not need to register an account before participating in the community. Feel free to click on a board below that interests you and jump right in!

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the [Rules](#) before posting, and read the [FAQ](#) if you wish to learn more about how to use the site.









### Boards

filter ▼

<b>Japanese Culture</b> Anime & Manga Anime/Cute Anime/Wallpapers Mecha Cosplay & EGL Cute/Male Flash Transportation Otaku Culture <b>Video Games</b> Video Games Video Game Generals Pokémon Retro Games	<b>Interests</b> Comics & Cartoons Technology Television & Film Weapons Auto Animals & Nature Traditional Games Sports Alternative Sports Science & Math History & Humanities International Outdoors Toys	<b>Creative</b> Oekaki Papercraft & Origami Photography Food & Cooking Artwork/Critique Wallpapers/General Music Fashion 3DCG Graphic Design Do-It-Yourself Worksafe GIF Quests	<b>Other</b> Business & Finance Travel Fitness Paranormal Literature Advice LGBT Pony Current News Worksafe Requests <b>Misc. (NSFW)</b> Random ROBOT9001 Politically Incorrect Cams & Meetups Shit 4chan Says	<b>Adult (NSFW)</b> Sexy Beautiful Women Hardcore Handsome Men Hentai Ecchi Yuri Hentai/Alternative Yaoi Torrents High Resolution Adult GIF Adult Cartoons Adult Requests
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### Popular Threads

options ▼

<b>Comics &amp; Cartoons</b>  ITT: Worst version of the character	<b>Anime &amp; Manga</b>  Youjo Senki: Will SilverLink and the Strike/Brave Witch crew animate this?	<b>Video Game Generals</b>  /domg/ - Dominions General: DOMINIONS IS DEAD, LONG LIVE DOMINIONS edition Previous Pantokrator >>146526389 Dominions is a...	<b>Music</b>  TAKE A LOOK AT THESE ^^^
<b>Television &amp; Film</b>  /who/ - Doctor Who General: Can't outrun the Orford edition Last thread >>71355906	<b>Video Games</b>  Polygon does it again https://youtu.be/v_uJ47oKHY0? t=396	<b>Outdoors</b>  Homegrownen (Farming and Gardening) Thread #61: Old thread: >>797118	<b>Fashion</b>  Stupid Questions / Fuccboi Thread: It's time and I have a few myself to get started.

<https://www.technologyreview.com/s/420323/radical-opacity/>

76 "Frequently Asked Questions," *4chan*, accessed August 14, 2016. <http://www.4chan.org/faq>.

Each of the boards at the top of the page consists of between 10 and 15 pages of discussion threads created by the users. If a thread is not popular its lack of replies or activity cause it to fall off the bottom of the last page as other more popular topics are promoted above it. At this point it is frozen and no new content can be added to it. Originally once a thread fell off the bottom of the last page it was gone forever<sup>77</sup>, a measure which was probably implemented as a way to reduce server storage costs. However numerous archiving systems have been established to preserve previous topics for posterity.

True to its 2chan source, users do not have to identify themselves but have the option to do so if they chose. This process involves adopting an identity in the form of a 'tripcode'. This identifiable and unique tag enables users to recognise each other's content. This is largely frowned upon as a breach of social convention and an easy vector for interpersonal drama and attention-seeking<sup>78</sup>:



77 Kevin McDonald, "From Indymedia to Anonymous: Rethinking Action and Identity in Digital Cultures," *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 8 (2015): 972-18:8, 968-982 2015 p.972

78 "Tripcode users summed up," *Reddit*, posted June 4, 2011, [https://www.reddit.com/r/4chan/comments/hradm/tripcode\\_users\\_summed\\_up/](https://www.reddit.com/r/4chan/comments/hradm/tripcode_users_summed_up/).

The benefits of anyone posting in any thread without having to verify or decide upon their identity in any way matches Hiroyuki's original vision for 2chan; a horizontal space where anyone can say anything without fear of reproach, attribution or identification. Arguments and debates can become heated, but once a thread is archived or deleted it is frozen in time or gone forever, replaced by different topics or supplementary ones to carry on the debate. This fairly basic system, or rather a translation error within it, was the source of Anonymous' nomenclature and collective pseudonym. On 29 October 2003 a bug relating to the way in which 4chan's source code had been translated meant that instead of outputting the correct user identity it would output 'Anonymous'<sup>79</sup>.

Given its origins as a bootleg online content silo for somethingawful.com, 4chan was initially focused on displaying and discussing Japanese popular culture<sup>80</sup>. This range of topics has grown since 2003 and covers a wide array of subjects; these include but are not limited to art, cooking, video games, cars, photography, travel and literature, as well as a substantial amount of pornography and sexually explicit material. Each channel is given a label of up to four letters prefixed and suffixed with forward slashes, for example the music, cooking and video games boards are labelled /mu/, /ck/ and /v/ respectively. These boards all tend to operate in the same manner with regards to their respective topic(s).

Freelance writer and media consultant Cole Stryker's book 'Epic Win for Anonymous: How 4chan's Army Conquered the Web' includes an account of his experience of visiting many of the boards over a 12-hour period, framing himself as Virgil leading the reader as Dante through a digital inferno<sup>81</sup>. For the purposes of extrapolating the history of Anonymous the most relevant of these boards is one of 4chan's most popular ones, the 'Random' board, known as '/b/'. /b/ was 4chan's second board created after the animé board /a/. Its original function was a quarantine zone for disruptive and antagonistic users. The day after 4chan's launch, October 2, 2003, Poole posted in 4chan's news section answering a number of questions, including the apparent lawlessness of /b/. Poole stated that 'If you bother to read the rules, you'll see /b/ is meant to be nothing short of a retard bin for now. It will be changed within the week'<sup>82</sup>. This change did not happen and /b/ continued as a board with no fixed

79 Christopher Poole, "More Errors," *4chan*, October 29, 2003, <http://www.4chan.org/4channews.php?all#15>.

80 Animated and printed (respectively) Japanese cartoons

81 Stryker, 42.

82 Christopher Poole, "WORLD2CH," *4chan*, October 2, 2003, <http://www.4chan.org/4channews.php?all#6>.



topic or specialised focus of discussion ever since; Stryker describes /b/ as “...the new “railroad tracks down by the river.” The new “out behind the 7-11”...where bored kids craving cheap thrills go to experience something, *anything* might surprise them or subvert their expectations”<sup>83</sup>. On /b/ there is no restriction on what can be said and shown, beyond the universal rules that are applied to every board; no content that violates US law, a notional minimum age requirement of 18 to visit the site, don’t impersonate administrators or flood the boards with advertising. /b/ is impossible to understand comprehensively, but at least a passing experience of /b/ is vital to gain a sense of the cultural norms and cynical humour which formed the bedrock of the social environment which gave rise to Anonymous.

4chan, and by extension Anonymous are part of what software engineer and prolific author on the interfacing of technology and culture David Auerbach describes as 'A-culture'<sup>84</sup>. As discussed in the previous chapter, Auerbach links this obsessive cultural sub-sector with the increasing availability of modems and internet connectivity throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium. Combined with the rise of websites designed for self-promotion such as LiveJournal and DeviantArt, he draws these together with the underpinning connection that:

...all of these sites were closely focused on interests rather than the personalities of users, which link them to Otaku and has come to distinguish A-culture from mainstream social networks like Facebook<sup>85</sup>.

According to Auerbach A-culture exhibits a number of characteristics which have emerged from this primarily written and anonymised social environment<sup>86</sup> and 4chan is no exception. The first characteristic of A-culture is velocity. On 4chan discussion can move so fast that participants must continually contribute to maintain their status in the constant flow of images, language and conventions. This flow has been measured through an analysis of the lifespan of discussion threads; the average thread on /b/ has a lifespan from creation to automatic locking of less than four minutes<sup>87</sup>. While Auerbach categorises velocity as a

83 Stryker, 67.

84 Auerbach, *ibid*.

85 *Ibid*.

86 *Ibid*.

87 Michael S. Bernstein et al, “4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community,” in *The Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Weblogs and Social Media* (California: The AAAI Press, 2011), 53.

feature of A-culture, in the case of Anonymous it is a velocity that does not come from a collective desire or sense of direction. Instead it comes from an existential need to keep moving and feeding on new content; images, videos, ideas and discussions to drive the community forward and avoid stagnation. For 4chan and Anonymous this need is all the greater; the lack of verifiable structures of identity and solidarity beyond the central hub of 4chan itself means that there is little common ground among the population beyond their interest in a particular subject or their continuing presence on the boards.

The second characteristic is ironisation, built on the concept that absolutely nothing is sacred or immune from ridicule/parody. This is an aspect of Anonymous that confuses their opponents as any insults or threats directed against them are often reflected back at their detractors having been turned around and wielded as a badge of pride or new label, rendering said threats harmless. The language or visual elements of these threats are often used in turn to shock others or as continued sources of ridicule. An early example of this was the irate and aggressive YouTube video made by the father of 4chan raid victim Jessica Leonhardt in 2010<sup>88</sup>. His sincere yet clumsy threats against her assailants were rapidly dismantled and absorbed into 4chan's visual and linguistic vocabulary, including phrases such as 'You done goofed', 'I've back-traced it', 'you've been reported to the cyber-police' and 'consequences will never be the same'<sup>89</sup>.

As an example of the ironisation process in action the language of the video was dismantled and reconstituted into Anonymous' vocabulary. This process undermines the efforts of their assailants, providing more ammunition in the form of regurgitating their statements back at them in a form of linguistic Judo. Whoever was harassing Jessica was unlikely to be genuinely threatened by her father's rantings, however the re-hosting and repetition of these phrases meant that her, her father's statements and the whole scenario stayed relevant and popular, falling within the categories of ironisation as well as the third characteristic of A-culture, self-documentation<sup>90</sup>. The videos, responses and other materials have been preserved on websites which have sprung up to catalogue the otherwise ephemeral nature of A-culture in an environment in which such record-keeping does not naturally exist.

88 Youdun goofed9, "Consequences Will Never be the Same [Original Video]," YouTube video, 1:31, Posted July 23, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEAyml3Fxgo>.

89 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower Spy*, 44.

90 Auerbach, *ibid*.

The fourth category is that of elitism which Auerbach describes as a shield that protects all participants '...from having their real-life qualities associated with their personae and words, frequently the only defining characteristics of participants are their memberships in these forums'<sup>91</sup>. Gabriella Coleman observes that particular manifestation of elitism exists in the 4chan environment where there is almost no barrier to entry, where acclimatisation to the collective linguistic and behavioural norms and expectations is indicative of one's awareness of the current meta-Zeitgeist on an individual level<sup>92</sup>. This is not to say that 4chan is completely free of structures, even if they exist in an abstract form and in a constant state of flux. With absolutely no barriers to entry other means to establish collective identity and cement one's place as part of the in-group have developed over time. One of the first and most overt elements of this is the tone of language that is used across the 4chan community. To the uninitiated 4chan would appear to be a foul den of racist, misogynistic homophobes<sup>93</sup>. The following text is taken from a thread on /b/, seen on August 7 2013:

'hey /b/  
I'm here with a friend who doesn't believe that the internet has worse than one guy one jar<sup>94</sup>.  
please /b/, I want to make this motherfucker spew. will bump with soft pron[sic].'

In an example of the transient nature of 4chan in its capacity as a 'place to be wrong', this thread had '404'd'<sup>95</sup> within half an hour of it being found and documented. The first few responses range from soft pornography to discussing the types of horrendous content available on the internet. Eventually the discussion switches to a continuous gallery of some of the worst still and moving images imaginable; a flip-book of death and violence that range from photos of autopsies, suicides and war casualties. Throughout the thread people refer to themselves and each other as 'faggots', the subjects of pictures of anyone non-white are often referred to as 'niggers', women are constantly referred to as 'bitches'. One comment to a picture of a dismembered naked female torso simply reads:

'That's gotta be the perfect woman. Never talks, says no, portable as fuck.  
>10/10 would bang'

91 Auerbach, *ibid.*

92 Coleman, "Our Weirdness is Free."

93 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower Spy*, 41.

94 "1 Guy 1 Jar," *Know Your Meme*, Last modified 2015, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/1-guy-1-jar>.

95 When a thread drops off the bottom of the last page (which in /b/'s case is 15) it returns the error 404 – the page can no longer be found as it had been deleted

This thread was a prime example of the 'economy of offense', an idea which relates to the aforementioned concepts of creating identifiable in/out groups. The barrage of offensive language and even more offensive imagery serves two purposes. Firstly it serves to 'maintain an equilibrium of offence designed to drive away anyone who is not sympathetic to the general libertarian mind-set'<sup>96</sup>. Secondly it solidifies group identity and participation. Those involved in the discussion are trying to be more offensive than the previous contributor<sup>97</sup>. Auerbach compares this process to the cosmic horrors of H. P. Lovecraft's 'Cthulhu Mythos'; tales of cosmic horror in which the protagonists of each story are exposed to ancient and terrible knowledge that, once experienced, leaves them 'vulnerable to terrible forces that to most people are imaginary and harmless. The danger attached to this knowledge gives it currency'<sup>98</sup>. While this concept of playing with and breaking the taboos around transgressive material is nothing new<sup>99</sup>, the internet has given the process a competitive edge with an unlimited audience able to instantly reciprocate and escalate their response in kind. This creates a form of meta-game in which the participants attempt to out-gross each other in as puerile a manner as possible.

The above example however, is not fully representative of /b/. It is impossible to sit down and read 4chan in its entirety; posts move too fast and change too quickly to take it all in. The day after the previously discussed topic appeared there were discussions about programming languages, Australian politics, riddles/word games and a thread in which a self-proclaimed 'bored attention whore' posted pictures of herself in underwear holding up a 'timestamp'. A timestamp is a piece of paper or some other evidence showing the date and time the picture was taken. This indicates the subject's awareness of /b/ provides evidence that the picture is genuine and not one which has been taken from elsewhere. In a microcosm of 4chan's capricious and contradictory nature, this particular thread in particular was rapidly hijacked by users posting pictures of animals using playground slides instead.

96 Auerbach, *ibid.*

97 Luke Goode, "Anonymous and the Political Ethos of Hacktivism," *Popular Communication* 13, no. 1 (2015), 76.

98 Auerbach, *ibid.*

99 'Penny Dreadful' pulp novels; cheaply produced books of Gothic thrillers, tales of contemporary criminals and other gory/sensationalist literature were immensely popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and achieved similar aims of breaking taboos and depicting dramatic or violent subject matter to drive sales.



Adopting the language of 4chan and being aware of/using timestamps can be seen as linguistic signalling of identity which, combined with other customs and traditions, establishes authenticity and social capital. Keeping abreast of the latest conventions, terminology and conventions marks one as a frequent visitor to the site as opposed to a 'newfag' who is unaware of such thing. One example of this which has passed into the annals of 4chan history was 'triforcing'. This subtle trap exposed the uninitiated for the ironisation and self-documentation of the established community, as well as becoming a source of humour in itself. A user would make a post using a particular series of Unicode characters to produce the symbol known as the Triforce from the 'The Legend of Zelda' video game series<sup>100</sup>. If anyone just copies and pastes the triangles without the correct coding, it comes out wrong, which highlights their lack of skills<sup>101</sup> or experience<sup>102</sup>:



Being able to successfully Triforce reinforces one's status and generates social capital however this process only works one way. If, for example, an individual attempts to Triforce and gets it wrong they may be admonished for it, called a 'newfag' etc. However the anonymised nature of 4chan means that any failure to uphold these conventions is impossible to follow up and is quickly forgotten. This process has led to a recurring phenomenon on /b/ which extends to 4chan as a whole. Intermittent threads on /b/ and articles on Encyclopaedia Dramatica cover the issue of 'newfags', also known as 'the cancer that is killing /b/'. This phenomenon is a direct result of 4chan's increased popularity as the site has attracted successive younger generations of digital natives intrigued by its reputation as the wild west

100 "Triforce," *Encyclopedia Dramatica*, accessed August 14, 2016, <https://encyclopedia.dramatica.se/Triforce>.

101 Bernstein et al, 56.

102 "Newfags can't Triforce," *Reddit*, accessed July 10, 2016, [https://www.reddit.com/r/4chan/comments/1liyx4/newfags\\_cant\\_triforce/](https://www.reddit.com/r/4chan/comments/1liyx4/newfags_cant_triforce/).

of the internet, driven by the sporadic media attention the site receives. Much of this attention comes vicariously through reports on Anonymous As a result this repeated influx of 'newfags' has allegedly compromised the quality and tone of /b/ and 4chan as a whole. The following is an example of such criticisms taken from a thread posted on August 8 2013:

This site seriously went to fucking shit. Don't tell me /b/ was always shit, because it was never this much fucking shit. All you summer newfriend faggots, go back to Reddit. Anyone who found this site through a hacktivist documentary, go the fuck back to Facebook. Under 18? Go suck your moms titty. Out of the 900+ threads I've seen in the past month, maybe two of them were decent. Wanna know which ones they were? The ones where people screen-capped shit that happened on old /b/. Fuck you for ruining my happiness.

>Tl;dr<sup>103</sup>

This site is shit, and it's your fault.

Part of this tirade is a critique of the increased interest in 4chan and Anonymous from hacktivism documentaries, a side effect of Anonymous' high visibility through their actions and attacks since 2008 and is an example of the A-culture characteristics of self-documentation and elitism in action. The criticisms in this post are directed against the influx of new users who are not acquainted with the 'old ways', identifying the only recent valid contributions to be reminiscing over how good things were back in the old days. Some of the responses include:

OP is a huge fucking faggot. /b/ has never been good, it has always been shit, it has always been repost after copypasta<sup>104</sup> after samefag.<sup>105</sup>

and

'that's what happens when you got media attention...  
first two rules we constantly broke[d] and AIDS were caught'

The second response is an affirmation of the first, that 4chan's popularity has been its downfall. This idea of new participants coming in and ruining it for everyone is a problem not limited to 4chan. It is a concept Stryker touches upon in his discussion of early internet users in the 1980s and 1990s which experienced the 'Eternal September'<sup>106</sup>. This was a period in

103 Too long; didn't read. This term is either a derogatory condemnation of a post that goes on for too long or, in this case, as a frame for an abbreviated summary for those who don't read the text body.

104 Copypasta' is a corruption of the term 'copy and paste' – implying the repetition of previously posted content.

105 Samefagging is the act of posting replies to your own topic which nobody else is replying to; this generates the false impression that others are discussing the subject when they are not, artificially keeping an uninteresting thread at the top of the discussion list.

106 Stryker, 114.

which universities were giving their students access to internet services which at the time would have been prohibitively expensive for the normal user. This meant that at the start of every academic year, in September, there was a regular cycle of new contributors who hadn't learned the established rules or behavioural frameworks for what had been a small and close-knit community. This expanded outside of university campuses in the 1990s when America Online (AOL) offered early internet access to its customers. At this point the 'Eternal September' began and, according to at least one 4chan user, continues to this day.

The second response mentions the 'first two rules'. This refers to a now-antiquated list of the 'rules of the internet'; a long list of spurious and apocryphal rules regarding internet conduct that in turn can be seen as a condensed crib-sheet of the catchphrases, in-jokes and axioms commonly associated with 4chan and early internet culture<sup>107</sup>, or as an early tongue-in-cheek attempt at netiquette. The 'rules of the internet' can be seen as a summation of the early ideas and social co-constructions of internet culture in the early to mid-2000s. The 'first two rules' in the above response refers to the first two 'rules of the internet':

1. Do not talk about /b/
2. Do NOT talk about /b/<sup>108</sup>

These have been adapted from Chuck Palahniuk's novel 'Fight Club' and can be seen as an attempt to halt the Eternal September, the idea being that by not spreading information and awareness about 4chan and /b/ in particular, the tide of 'newfags' can be turned. This limiting of information about it will preserve 4chan according to an ideal that, certainly now, is no longer realistic or existed in the first place. This sentiment is expressed in two replies to the above 'OP':

I've been here since 2007.  
/b/ doesn't change, It truly doesn't.  
We've been complaining about summer<sup>109</sup> and how shitty it all was since then.  
It was horrible, it was always horrible.

107 "Rules of the Internet," *Know Your Meme*, last modified March 15, 2015,  
<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/rules-of-the-internet>.

108 "The Rules of the Internet," *Encyclopedia Dramatica*, last modified 12 April, 2016,  
[https://encyclopedia.dramatica.se/Rules\\_of\\_the\\_internet](https://encyclopedia.dramatica.se/Rules_of_the_internet).

109 Another term related to the 'Eternal September' that lambastes the influx of school-age young people who are not in school during the summer break onto sites like 4chan.

Another Anon replied to this with a nihilistic contemplation of 4chan's cyclical nature:

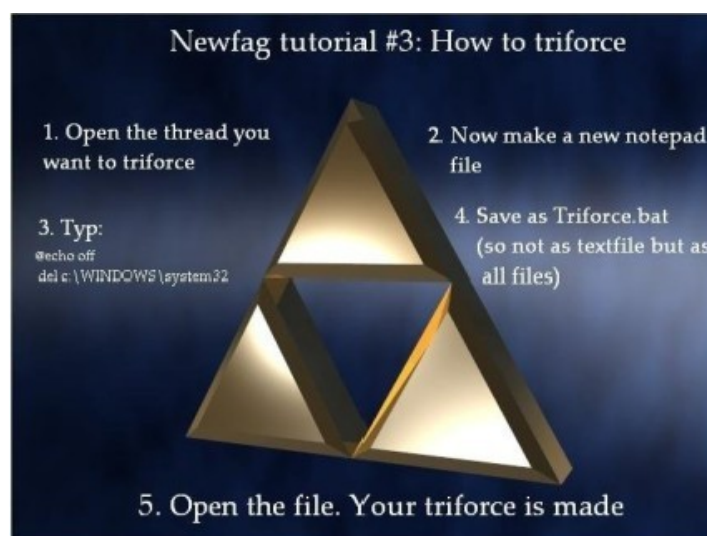
So in a way you are saying we are mentally stuck in the same year as when we first stumbled upon 4chan and this is our living purgatory in which the something[sic] happens over and over again.

This conversation is an example of an entrenched elitist social convention which has existed at the core of the 4chan community and, by extension, of Anonymous since the beginning. 4chan is defined by its construction of anonymity, it is Poole's 'place to be wrong'; anyone and everyone can read or participate in the conversations which take place on it. Whereas Facebook and MySpace made themselves ubiquitous by accelerating and expanding the process of human communication through sharing information and verifiable identity, 4chan was built to facilitate anonymised communication detached from the identity of the author and the social hierarchical conventions which come with it. Without these easily readable cues of social self-identification and coupled with 4chan's initial reputation as a secret 'underground' website<sup>110</sup> the 4chan community, especially /b/, developed a paranoid siege mentality. 4chan is apparently under constant threat from 'newfags' who would expand but also dilute the community. This would increase awareness of 4chan, spinning this allegedly destructive process into a never-ending cycle.

This is why the first two 'rules of the internet' are what they are; talking about 4chan and /b/ in particular would bring in more 'newfags' who would in turn bring more of their friends onto the site, and so on. Facebook and Reddit rose to prominence in the social media spaces as the 2000s continued, centralising online human communication which previously took place across an array of forums and message-boards. The 'This site is shit, and it's your fault' post above shows how this siege mentality has cast these other social networks as their principle nemeses, who dare to befoul 4chan with their presence and are a serious, existential threat. As 4chan is an anonymous communication hub there is and has never been a way to consistently or accurately vet anyone visiting the site. This siege mentality is one of the core hypocrisies of 4chan and by extension Anonymous; flaws which entrenched themselves once the latter had grown beyond the confines of the former. Social websites like 4chan require

110 Caitlin Dewey, "Absolutely everything you need to know to understand 4chan, the Internet's own bogeyman," *The Washington Post*, September 25, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/09/25/absolutely-everything-you-need-to-know-to-understand-4chan-the-internets-own-bogeyman/>.

new users and contributors to stay alive however anyone not suitably versed in the meta-lore fall into an ever-expanding category of the ubiquitous and destructive ‘other’; an endless horde of newfags who, despite the necessity of such an extant population from whom new users may come, need to be kept out at all costs. It is possible to see David Auerbach’s principles of A-culture in action through a set of images which demonstrate elitism and ironisation in practice. The first claims to offer guidance on how to Triforce<sup>111</sup> while the second claims to show how to join Anonymous<sup>112</sup>:



111 “Newfag Tutorial #3: How to triforce,” *Funnyjunk*, accessed August 9, 2016, [http://funnyjunk.com/funny\\_pictures/1385530/How#cb17d5\\_1385086](http://funnyjunk.com/funny_pictures/1385530/How#cb17d5_1385086).

112 “How to join Anonymous,” *Funnyjunk*, accessed August 9, 2016, <http://funnyjunk.com/How+to+join+anonymous/funny-pictures/5181294/>.

Both of these images are examples of 4chan's importance as one of the foundations of 2000s internet culture<sup>113</sup>. They are social land mines buried in the no man's land between 4chan and the rest of the internet; it is hard to tell whether their main purpose is humour for those in the know or for catching the young, naive and/or unaware off guard. Both of these images display the same set of instructions; creating an executable file which deletes a folder vital to the functioning of the Windows operating system. This will mean the only way to restore functionality is to wipe the hard drive and reinstall the operating system. As with many elements of 4chan, internet culture and Anonymous, we will never know who created these images in the first place, or their exact motivation for doing so as images like this bounce around the internet, hosted and re-hosted with different names and in different locations.

Although largely flippant in nature, these images and the above discussion of the perceived constant threat from 'newfags' show that even to this day there is an undercurrent of paranoia and elitism on 4chan. In 2014, 10 years after the creation of 4chan Poole explained the problem with participatory accountability in an interview with the Guardian:

People think that identity means accountability, that if you have a name and face you're accountable for your actions, right? I don't think that's true at all, I think that if you look at 4chan, 4chan's one of the most accountable communities on the web...you have to talk the talk and walk the walk to participate. If you don't they'll really force you out<sup>114</sup>.

Anonymous brought forward these ideas of accountability, that one is judged by one's actions rather than one's identity. This was combined with a communal alignment against a perceived enemy which over time expanded in scope beyond inter-community squabbling to bigger political issues outside of the confines of 4chan. Underpinning these concepts is a tautological relationship between the enemies Anonymous needs to catalyse operational cohesion and motivate individual participation. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, this mechanism is Anonymous' source of strength and momentum but it is also one of Anonymous' greatest weaknesses. Before discussing the implications of this it is important to establish how a subset of an image-board website in the mid-2000s changed from an insular community into a capricious political brand through providential events often outside their control.

113 Brophy-Warren, *ibid*.

114 Christopher Poole and Aleks Krotoski, *Founder of 4Chan Chris Poole, the 'anti-Zuckerberg' – podcast*, The Guardian Tech Weekly, MP3, 30:55, accessed October 10, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/audio/2014/jul/10/podcast-chris-pool-4chan-podcast>.



### The growth of proto-Anonymous, /b/-day and the self-fulfilling prophecy

The first few years of 4chan's operation were punctuated with frequent stability and bandwidth problems. In an ironic reversal of history Christopher Poole had to block all Japanese traffic from accessing 4chan in December 2003 due to the costs of high bandwidth usage. 4chan's original web address 4chan.net was suspended in 2004 and changed to 4chan.org. This was originally supposed to be a temporary measure but became permanent two months later and is the domain name the site uses to this day. Throughout 2004 the increased traffic meant even higher server/bandwidth costs. This escalation in popularity forced Poole to openly ask for donations several times to keep the site functional<sup>115</sup>.

In 2005 more board topics were added. This included boards labelled 'safe for work' which were for posting and discussing pictures of animals, technology, photography and the like, free from violent or pornographic material. In the same year 4chan made its first steps into the real world, hosting a panel at a convention in Baltimore<sup>116</sup>. This expansion was tempered by the need to purchase \$20,000 of additional servers, \$14,000 of which was raised by the 'Donate or Die' campaign<sup>117</sup>. By 2006 the hardware problems and money costs had been addressed. Throughout this tumultuous formative period /b/'s activities were largely introspective, its population posted images and discussed topics in an environment that celebrated success but completely forgot failure<sup>118</sup>.

This process was a result of the anonymised social space the 4chan boards offered. Popular materials were circulated and/or altered into new forms while unpopular materials dropped off the bottom of the last page and were forgotten. The same process meant that if you were proved wrong in a factual discussion or simply shouted down you could move on into another thread without carrying those past interactions with you. At the same time 4chan's external activities were limited to 'raids' on other websites. Once a suitable target had been found the raiders would post on their forums in a disruptive or bellicose manner, inciting a response from them which the raiders hoped would be as dramatic and over the top as possible. When considering this period as part of Anonymous' development the specifics of the majority of the

115 "Complete History of 4chan," *Tanasinn.info*, accessed May 10, 2014, [http://tanassinn.info/wiki/Complete\\_History\\_of\\_4chan](http://tanassinn.info/wiki/Complete_History_of_4chan).

116 4chan, "4chan: The Otakon 2005 Panel," YouTube video, 51:45, Posted September 24, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mRp3QNkhrC>.

117 Ibid.

118 Dibbell, *Radical Opacity*, 3.

4chan raids and organised trolling campaigns are unimportant; an internet community were selected based on predictions of their collective overreaction and who were baited into providing said reaction. The first tentative steps towards the population of /b/ becoming politicised over larger issues which would lead to the creation of the Anonymous identity as we know it began in 2006.

The summer of 2006 saw a surge in the levels of illegal content posted on /b/ as well as an increased number of proposed raids to harass other websites and online communities. This entire process was carried out 'for the lulz'; a sense of transgressive gallows humour that is laced with a hint of menace and the lurking suggestion that more serious actions could follow<sup>119</sup>. This factors into Auerbach's categorisation of ironisation and self-documentation; the resulting fallout is preserved as due to the inherently fleeting and temporary nature of the communications therein it would otherwise go unreported. Many of these events now only live on as recycled and re-hosted entries on internet culture catalogue sites such as KnowYourMeme.com. The vast majority of these raids are either lost to internet history or were not important enough to document in the first place. However, a few can be seen as milestones or turning points which would in turn develop into the strategic and tactical template the Anonymous identity would epitomise two years later.

#### The first digital skirmishes and the formation of proto-Anonymous

The first raid relevant to Anonymous' development prior to the anti-Scientology protests of 2008 was the raid against the social platform Habbo Hotel on July 12 2006<sup>120</sup>. Habbo Hotel was launched in 2000 and was one of the first wave of social network sites. Habbo Hotel was primarily aimed at teenagers and operated with a graphical user interface, much like a video game. Users choose a character to represent themselves through which they interact with the world and each other, walking around a large isometric complex of social areas. The attackers created identical black male characters with suits and large afro haircuts. The attackers formed blockades to restrict access to certain areas of the 'hotel' by standing in doorways and corridors. Much of the effort was centred around the swimming pool area where they made large swastika formations with announcements that the pool was closed due to AIDS<sup>121</sup>. This

119 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower Spy*, 30-33.

120 DshaunT, "The Habbo Hotel Raid Pool's Closed," YouTube video, 5:50, posted April 6, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02o5bISvkCI>.

121 McDonald, *From Indymedia to Anonymous: Rethinking Action and Identity in Digital Cultures*, 974.



event has become so ingrained in 4chan's linguistic social vocabulary that it appears in the above comments from 2013 discussing the state/quality of /b/, over six years later<sup>122</sup>:



The administrators clamped down on this offensive and disruptive behaviour, both to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of their user base and to mitigate any potential wider coverage. For a service run for younger people such negative press is a death sentence should news of this activity spread to the wider media<sup>123</sup>. The moderating team banned anyone creating an avatar resembling the one used in the attack as well as blocking a number of otherwise innocuous words and phrases that had been adopted by the attackers<sup>124</sup>. These damage control measures only provided the attackers with more ammunition. The attackers responded by spreading the message that the moderators of Habbo were on a racist banning spree, only banning black characters from the site in rapid succession. Other countermeasures taken by the Habbo staff

122 "Pool's Closed." *Know Your Meme*, last modified February 20, 2015, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pools-closed/>.

123 An investigative report by Channel 4 News in 2012 found widespread and unchecked child grooming activity on Habbo; "What is happening in Habbo Hotel?", Channel 4, August 14, 2012, <http://www.channel4.com/news/what-is-happening-in-habbo-hotel>.

124 "Pool's Closed." *Know Your Meme*.

included changing the automated dialogue of the non-player characters around the pool area to include overt messages such as “The Habbo pool is the cleanest pool you could swim in!” and “The Pool Deck is the best moderated room in all of Habbo!”<sup>125</sup> The attacks themselves were short lived however they have become cultural anchors that as we have seen in the previous examples of contemporary 4chan discussion still have cultural relevance today.

This escalation of illegal content and capricious militancy which the Habbo Hotel raid was a part of peaked on August 22 2006. On this day a number of websites were raided in rapid succession. These targets ranged from a forum for the Legend of Zelda video game franchise to pro-anorexia forums and Furry communities<sup>126</sup>. Until this point /b/'s function as 4chan's pressure valve meant that it had been given a generous amount of leeway as a 'place to be wrong'; relatively lax rules and moderation meant that the content posted there was quite extreme but the community was relatively stable. This surge of external aggressive activity was considered as by Poole and the moderating team as having gone too far. The following day, August 23 2006, would become known in internet lore as '/b/day'<sup>127</sup>. 4chan's moderating team and even Poole himself implemented stringent punishments for creating or responding to threads that incited raids or contained illegal content:

Participating in a thread dealing with illegal content will get you globally banned for two weeks (thread starter is indefinitely banned). This means merely replying to it removes you from this site for a minimum of two weeks. This includes...any other "gray area" threads. Posting any piece of personal information or inciting/participating in an invasion of any sort will also get you, and anybody who replied to the thread globally banned.<sup>128</sup>

/b/ had a set of given rules and minimal frameworks of behaviour however due to the anonymous nature of the 4chan community it was hard to determine the severity or breadth of the site's moderation framework. 4chan's moderation policy had been in place since the beginning but due to the limited frequency of material that breached them their enforcement had not been visible to the average user. As could have been expected from a community that had been used to near-absolute freedom, the general reaction was extremely hostile and self-

125 “The Great Habbo Raid of July 2006,” *Encyclopedia Dramatica*, accessed April 16, 2013, [https://encyclopedia.dramatica.se/The\\_Great\\_Habbo\\_Raid\\_of\\_July\\_2006](https://encyclopedia.dramatica.se/The_Great_Habbo_Raid_of_July_2006).

126 Furies are a subculture for those interested in anthropomorphic animal characters with human personalities, and are a common target for harassment and ridicule, particularly on 4chan.

127 “/b/-day,” *Encyclopedia Dramatica*, accessed November 8, 2013, [https://encyclopedia.dramatica.se/B\\_day](https://encyclopedia.dramatica.se/B_day).

128 Ibid.

destructive; 4chan suffered repeated DDOS<sup>129</sup> attacks and large portions of the community moved to different image-boards such as 7chan.org. 7chan was created in 2005 but gained popularity as a potential new home for /b/ refugees as it claimed to operate on the original unrestricted rules that the /b/ population had come to expect and sought to defend. At some point during the chaotic events of /b/day, an 'official' statement was released:

When in the course of /b/tard events, it becomes necessary for Anonymous to break free from the shackles of oppression set forth by the Furfag mods of 4chan.org. They have plundered our posts, and deprived us of our jailbait. They have forced upon us their twisted ideology of "Furry Fandom." They have deprived us of our ability to fight our enemies, forcing us to submit to the wishes of the Furfag overlords.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated bans from our homeland. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free anonymous.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the Anonymous States of /b/, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good Anonymous of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That /b/ is, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States, that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the 4chan Crown, and that all political connection between /b/ and the State of 4chan, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

We are Anonymous. We are /b/. Our home is no longer on 4chan. In these times of unrest, we have formed the State of 7chan.org as our new sovereign nation on the World Wide Internet.  
Signed, Anonymous<sup>130</sup>.

Regardless of the hyperbolic and dramatic language which casts the events of /b/ day as a momentous and pivotal event, it has been almost entirely forgotten; all that remains of it today are lesser-known entries on internet culture archive websites such as Encyclopaedia Dramatica, Lurk More and Know Your Meme. This doesn't mean that the above statement lacks merit when considering 4chan's and Anonymous' symbiotic history. Firstly the above

129 Distributed Denial of Service. The targeted server is bombarded with automated information requests from all over the world. The speed and frequency of these requests slow legitimate users' access or force the server to crash or be taken offline for the duration.

130 "/b/-day," *Lurkmore*, accessed November 8, 2013, <http://www.lurkmore.com/wiki/b/day>.

statement borrows much of its structure and wording from the United States Declaration of Independence, a process of re-appropriation and reconstitution that would become widespread once Anonymous' imagery and linguistic template had been established. Secondly, as with the earlier materials detailing how to Triforce/join Anonymous, the above statement may well be entirely facetious; a humorous parody created as a lulz-worthy sending-up of how verbose arguments on the internet become. Thirdly it is one of the earliest example of a text containing the phrasing 'We are Anonymous' with a signature from the same. As will be discussed in chapter 5, even before the establishment of a clear visual language the concept of Anonymous a shared identity was forming and establishing the initial framework of autonomy away from 4chan.

In December 2006 the internet radio presenter Hal Turner, who had a reputation as a holocaust denier and white supremacist had run into financial difficulties and planned to broadcast his final online radio show on December 20 2006<sup>131</sup>. Armed with the knowledge of this event beforehand, a campaign of harassment against Turner was planned and executed. During his final show Turner was bombarded with prank calls questioning his right-wing beliefs, shouting insults and otherwise disrupting his programme as much as possible. The campaign spread to uncovering and releasing information about Turner's family culminating in a DDOS attack on his website. This limited the ability of legitimate traffic to access it and costed him significant data transfer fees<sup>132</sup>.

Turner traced some of the phone numbers of those who had called in and posted them on his website two days later as a warning to dissuade others from carrying out similar attacks in the future. Turner tried to pursue a lawsuit against 4chan and a number of other websites like 7chan for copyright infringement over his material that was leaked online as well as numerous counts of fraud and extortion<sup>133</sup>. The collective response from the administrators of the sites implicated in Turner's lawsuits was that Turner had made threats against them and their users and that the views represented by their users did not represent those of the staff/site owners<sup>134</sup>. Subsequent court documents were returned undelivered six months later, almost a year after

131 HAROLD C. " HAL" TURNER v. 4CHAN.ORG et al, filed January 19, 2007, Filing 1, 6,  
<http://bit.ly/175E0qw>.

132 Ibid., 8-11.

133 Ibid., 20-25.

134 HAROLD C. " HAL" TURNER v. 4CHAN.ORG et al, filed February 15, 2007, Filing 5, 1,  
<http://bit.ly/17JFqtO>.



the attack took place. By this point the case had been pending for more than 120 days. With no further activity from Turner the case was dismissed on December 17 2007<sup>135</sup>.

Seven months later, on July 26 2007 Fox News-affiliated television station KTTV aired a special report on Anonymous' antagonistic online activities;

They call themselves Anonymous, they are hackers on steroids, treating the web like a real-life video game...sacking websites and invading MySpace accounts, disrupting innocent peoples' lives...and if you fight back, watch out<sup>136</sup>.

The news report features numerous testimonials from victims who describe Anonymous as a 'hacker gang', an 'internet hate machine' as well as 'domestic terrorists'. Whitney Philips argues that this report gave Anonymous a considerable boost to their image and public relations as well as providing them with a branding strategy; 'By framing Anonymous (and its constituent trolls) as socially deviant, Fox News had inadvertently provided trolls with a behavioral blueprint, along with the promise of further coverage for similar behaviors'<sup>137</sup>. This kind of alarmist coverage inadvertently created a feedback loop of increasingly shrill and fearful reporting; painting 4chan as a hub of internet villainy and Anonymous as masked millennial bogeymen who Fox News' main demographic of old white men<sup>138</sup> could pour the ills of the world onto. This mechanism of hyperbole and sensationalism played into Anonymous' hands, leading to a wider scope of attacks, raids and other lulz-worthy events as more interested individuals flocked to the site to see what all the fuss was about. This played up to the expectations of the media reports<sup>139</sup>, giving Anonymous more media attention and ammunition. Each sensationalist report in turn provided Anonymous with positive reinforcement and feedback, that there were still plenty more lulz to extract and that their actions were having a clear effect. Philips paints Anonymous as essentially the same as the wider corporate media, '[Anonymous] troll Fox News by acting like Fox News, and troll Oprah Winfrey by acting like Oprah Winfrey, then howl with laughter when their chosen

135 HAROLD C. "HAL" TURNER v. 4CHAN.ORG et al, filed December 19, 2007, Filing 9, 1, <http://bit.ly/15AMUbQ>.

136 LOL MONEY, "Anonymous on FOX11," YouTube video, 4:17, posted July 27, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNO6G4ApJQY>.

137 Philips, 12.

138 Dylan Biers, "At Fox News, Grand Old Problems," *CNN*, posted July 27, 2016, <http://money.cnn.com/2016/07/27/media/fox-news-gop-problem/>.

139 Tim Jordan and Paul A. Taylor, *Hacktivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a cause?* (London: Routledge, 2004), 22.

targets unwittingly rail against their own reflections'<sup>140</sup>.

Throughout 2007 the external identity of Anonymous began to solidify at the same time as the original 'founding' intentions and principles began to dilute. Stryker identifies the escalation of attacks after the KTTV news report as 4chan's 'Eternal September'<sup>141</sup>. The feedback loop of activity and positive reinforcement brought a tidal wave of 'newfags' to 4chan which had the negative effect of drowning out raids which previously had been carried out in a relatively quiet and calm manner. This influx of new users forced planning for raids to move almost exclusively onto IRC chat rooms. In the relative time-scale of the internet IRC is an ancient text chat service that bore a number of similarities to 4chan. There are no requirements for account/email address registering and while registering a pseudonym with a particular server is optional, that identity doesn't persist between servers. In addition users can create temporary chat rooms, making it a perfect environment for planning away from the noise of 4chan's increasing population. 4chan was an important element of this shift in that it became a recruitment resource. 'GET IN HERE' posts with IRC links were posted on /b/ inviting interested parties to participate. This process was a numbers game; the more people who became interested in 4chan, /b/ and raids the higher the chance that individuals with technical abilities would be drawn in<sup>142</sup>.

This then is the position that the developing Anonymous community found itself as a collective identity at the end of 2007. What started out as a subsection of the community of an image-board website had grown into an emergent troll network with a score of victories under their belts. Combined with an increasing level of technical, rhetorical and organisational skill among its participants they were able to use the same techniques as the media to instigate beneficial feedback loops of attention as a recruitment service and operational record. As much as the 'oldfags' may have rolled their eyes at the waves of newcomers and longed for the good old days, the influx of new participants was laying the foundations for a decentralised global activist network whose actions in the early months of 2008 would eclipse their previous actions combined and thrust them into the first of many larger and more serious political spheres.

140 Philips, 22-23.

141 Stryker, 152.

142 Olson, p.16

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the unique origins of Anonymous, exploring the social and technological contexts which facilitated the growth and politicising of a vociferous subset of the 4chan community. 4chan itself is a fascinating outlier in the development of the internet and ‘internet culture’ in the mid-2000s; a space where identity, hierarchy and accountability are rejected or modified to provide a space for human communication without hierarchical pecking orders defining the worth of one collection of letters on a screen over another. It is from this environment that 4chan, /b/ and the proto-Anonymous community developed a belligerent approach to self-organisation from 2004-2008; attacking other internet communities for the lulz and fulfilling A-culture’s unstoppable need for constant refreshment and re-invigoration. This organisation and aggression continued to escalate until, in a pattern seen in ‘real world’ political movements, the radical or hard-line element challenged the authority of its moderate constituency. In Anonymous’ case this was a process which on the one hand was trivial and has been largely forgotten but on the other the events of ‘/b/ day’ are the first signs of the community identifying itself as ‘Anonymous’ beyond the bounds of 4chan’s nomenclature, the first steps towards the establishment of the Anonymous identity as it became and is still known today.

While focusing on the development of internet-facilitated political networks such as Anonymous it is easy to get caught up in focusing on the technological aspects; the ‘Web 2.0’ epoch of the early 2000s, the new ways the internet is being used for political purposes and how it is restructuring human communication on a global scale. However it is important to consider the wider historical context of how communications technologies have been used as political tools of control narrative destabilisation before. This is a process that is not restricted to Anonymous, the internet, the 20<sup>th</sup> century or electricity itself. The next chapter will consider the implications of such a long tail of political and social tensions, of which Anonymous is one of the modern embodiments and how it highlights the recurring and constant friction between the competing narrative realities which we create and propagate and those applied to us by the structures of society. The next chapter will explore this broader historical and political context, placing the development of Anonymous along the trajectory of this intertwined relationship between communications technology and the narrative tensions of power which they exacerbate.

### Chapter Three – The Connected Society

It is easy to focus on purely contemporary historical and technological contexts when looking at the Anonymous phenomenon. As discussed in the previous chapter the Anonymous identity grew out of the image-board culture of the mid-2000s, adopting the anarchic social structure and loose tolerance for any commercially or legislatively-driven restrictions on information and file-sharing. Despite the comparatively recent emergence of Anonymous as a group who use communications technologies to counter the narrative authority of the ruling systems in society<sup>143</sup> they were not the first; there are examples of this friction between the empowering effect on knowledge and information dispersion and the attempted restrictions by said institutions that date back to well before Anonymous, the Internet and even of electricity itself. From the co-option and alteration of spoken words<sup>144</sup> to the development of the printing press and beyond<sup>145</sup>, enterprising individuals and groups have made use of the expansion of communication technologies to subvert the symbolic power of the financial, political or religious structures of society in their respective times, places and socio-political contexts.

Although the above criteria for each example in this chapter are distinctly separate along all of the above criteria, there is a common trend which a large proportion of Anonymous' own actions also represent; propagating texts or images whose contents undermine the organs of the state who base themselves on the tacit acceptance of certain control narratives of authority in the mind of the reader or listener. This chapter will examine historical examples of such processes in action to show that Anonymous' relationship with the Internet as a similar means of counter-narrative communication is not a fundamental change to any sort of human/technological paradigm.

Many of the causes and controversies Anonymous involve themselves in for political traction and continuing relevancy such as information access and control, the right to privacy and the friction between the power of the individual and the state have come up time and again throughout the last 500 years. This chapter will explore some examples of this friction in action, beginning by examining the religious and political fallout from the Protestant

143 John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (United Kingdom: Polity Press, 1999), 16.

144 Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2002), 7.

145 Briggs and Burke, 77.



Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. During this period the commercially-driven expansion of movable type printing was used to undermine the authority of the Catholic Church, exploiting the social predilection for oration rather than the written word among late medieval society. As such only one copy of a translated Bible or heretical text was necessary for an entire community to have access to it. The increased availability of printed materials challenged the authority and necessity of the Church as mediators between man and God; texts openly critical of the Church and its practices facilitated debate and comparative critique in a way the Church could not react to in kind, despite initially utilising printing itself as a means of distributing its own materials to maintain the status quo.

This chapter will then explore how issues relevant to the discussion of internet politics such as privacy and the reliability of secure information systems are older than the internet or the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Electric Telegraph was the first global communications network, accelerating human communication throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As well as making messages faster and cheaper to send around the world than ever before, its development raised concerns over the privacy and security of information sent through its systems. These concerns over information control and how they affect our lives are resonant with the same debates over internet politics we engage in and see today. This discussion of the relevance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to contemporary issues of information politics will be expanded upon through a comparative examination of the Utilitarian motivations behind the Public Libraries Act of 1850 relative to the implementation of ‘Free Basics’; a programme by Facebook to provide free but heavily limited internet access to developing countries or particular economically disadvantaged strata thereof. This will illustrate the cyclical nature of these tensions and concerns which are common themes throughout Anonymous’ political discourse and of the historical and political relationship between people and communications technology.

The development of the internet is not an unprecedented or revolutionary technological moment or paradigmatic shift; it is not a communication singularity in which we cast off the shackles of physical existence<sup>146</sup> and ascend to a digital nirvana or technological utopia<sup>147</sup>. Tom Standage calls this chrono-centricity, “...the egotism that one’s own generation is poised

146 Elias Aboujaoude, MD, *Virtually You: The Dangerous Powers of the E-Personality* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 22.

147 Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century’s On-line Pioneers* (New York: Walker Publishing Inc., 1998), 211.

on the very cusp of history”<sup>148</sup>. It is easy to join the dots between microcosms within a chain of novel historical periods to facilitate an argument which backs up a particular trajectory of progress:

...much history of technology has been concerned with illustrations, through historical examples, of the nature of technological change. This is done by studying selected novelties, when they were new, in historically familiar surroundings, with the aim of illuminating the technology-society relation.<sup>149</sup>

This chapter is guilty of this in part, of ‘illuminating the technology-society relation’ through picking several initially disparate and disconnected historical case studies. However this process is a necessary evil as it is the most succinct way to explore the broader historical processes and tensions of which Anonymous is a contemporary example. This chapter does not suggest a direct causal link between the vastly different social and political contexts of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries; that Anonymous’ history can be directly traced back to Martin Luther or that the politics of the printing press in late medieval society and the Electric Telegraph in the 19<sup>th</sup> century follow on from each other in a linear fashion regardless of the centuries of history between them. The same goes for the comparison between Facebook’s gated internet access and the political function of social control which underpinned the establishment of public libraries in England in the 1850s. This chapter is proposing that, despite the centuries between these examples and the different political and social contexts of their development, the inherent human motivation behind their use as a tool to challenge authority has not dissipated or changed. Anonymous are one of the latest iterations of this motivation in action. Through utilising developments in the acceleration of human communication, those identifying with Anonymous and acting in its name have framed their campaigns along similar political lines through language similar in tone to arguments and debates which have been a factor of communication politics for centuries.

148 Ibid., 213.

149 David Edgerton, “Innovation, Technology, or History What is the Historiography of Technology About?,” *Technology and Culture* 51, no. 3 (2010): 683.

### Martin Luther, the Printing Press and the Reformation

Before discussing the effects of the printing press on late medieval society and the impact of the Protestant Reformation it is important to establish some context of the political and communication environments being discussed in this chapter. This contextual establishment is necessary to avoid what John B. Thompson describes as an endemic tendency in any historically-driven discussion of ‘the media’:

The texts are generally analysed in and for themselves, without reference to the aims and resources of those who produce them, on the one hand, or the ways in which they are used and understood by those who receive them, on the other. The producers and recipients slip out of sight, while the analyst or critic focuses on a cultural form which is, somewhat artificially, abstracted from the social conditions of its production, circulation and reception.’<sup>150</sup>

Taking this in consideration, what were the economic and political contexts of the world which the spread of movable-type printing would affect so dramatically? The early medieval world was organised around principles of agrarian/feudal economics. The number of people who owned the land this economy was based on was eclipsed by the number who actually worked and lived on it. This peasant class were tied to the particular area where they worked with a portion of their output taken by the land owner. From the eleventh century onwards this began to change through the growth of local, national and international exchange networks and the increasing use of money<sup>151</sup>.

For the majority of the population of medieval Europe being able to read was unnecessary. This was a period where ritual underpinned daily public and private life. From coronations and processions to public executions and religious ceremonies<sup>152</sup>; “What could not be recorded needed to be remembered, and what needed to be remembered had to be presented in a memorable way.<sup>153</sup>” This practice of imprinting cultural knowledge took place on the personal level not through direct access to written literature but through attending spoken readings of liturgical texts in church. Not limited to just the Bible, these texts were designed for a ‘...hearing not a reading public<sup>154</sup>’, a factor of the medieval understanding of the role of the written word commented on by Martin Luther himself, who stated that churches were ‘...a

150 Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*, 37-38.

151 Ibid., 47-48.

152 Briggs and Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, 40.

153 Ibid., 10.

154 Ibid.

mouth house not a pen house'<sup>155</sup>.

Prior to the arrival of moveable type printing in medieval Europe written information was reproduced through the 1:1 copying of an existing work by hand. This was a lengthy and complicated procedure requiring years of practice and training in order to master such a skilled and specialised occupation. This meant that books took a long time to make, cost a substantial amount of money and were created on a commission basis; enabling the patron to decide their contents. This meant that books produced in this way were therefore only accessible to the wealthy and literate. It was this control over the production of religious texts which framed and organised the ritual pattern of everyday life. This was further obfuscated through the preserving of the Bible in Latin rather than the lay language of the people. This position of control was further entrenched by the residual effects of the Black Death. The vast majority of books were manufactured in monasteries and nunneries, which were decimated by the plague and were one of the last areas of medieval society to be repopulated. Every able-bodied child was needed to reboot the economy through farm labour rather than pursuing ecumenical matters or learning to read and write. As a result, the monks and nuns capable of creating books were in high demand and able to charge even more for their services than before<sup>156</sup>.

This control over the social and religious frameworks of society was threatened by the arrival of moveable type printing in the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>157</sup>. Moveable-type printing as a technology had existed for centuries before its arrival in Europe; there are recorded instances of printing dating back 8<sup>th</sup> century China and Japan<sup>158</sup>. According to Elizabeth Eisenstein the arrival of moveable type printing in Europe in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century paved the way for a cultural revolution, however this opinion is not unanimous. Asa Briggs and Peter Burke question the claim of a printing 'revolution' stating that centuries of incremental development is far too long a period for it to be qualified as a 'revolution'<sup>159</sup>. Briggs and Burke claim that Eisenstein places too much emphasis on the medium itself rather than those who used it; instead of an

155 Briggs and Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, 28.

156 Rick Falkvinge, "History of Copyright, part 1: Black Death," *Falkvinge & Co. on Infopolicy*, accessed December 10, 2015,

<http://falkvinge.net/2011/02/01/history-of-copyright-part-1-black-death/>.

157 Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*, 52.

158 Briggs and Burke, 15.

159 Briggs and Burke, 22.

instigator of change printing was a catalyst which accelerated antecedent changes in social and political conditions which were under way<sup>160</sup>. According to Eisenstein this ‘revolution’ undermined and attacked the Church's dominant hold over the construction of reality for the peasant population; the spread of translated liturgical texts allowed a wider audience to debate their contents and expose contradictions and fallacies within them<sup>161</sup>, making a wider proportion of population more knowledgeable on the contents of the Bible than they had ever been<sup>162</sup>. By 1500 there were approximately 13 million books in circulation among a European population of 100 million, although this was not an even distribution. In Russia printing was met with heavy resistance from the Orthodox Church<sup>163</sup>. This uneven uptake shows that the printing ‘revolution’ was predicated on suitable socio-cultural conditions rather than just the availability of printing as a technology<sup>164</sup>.

This social and political upheaval of the world was the context of the life of Martin Luther. Born in Germany in 1483, he grew up in an environment of increased scepticism towards the Church's authority. He published a wide range of works which were openly critical of the Church's practices. He was against the Church's focus on financial gain justified as ecumenical necessity through the selling of Indulgences<sup>165</sup>, a short-cut to saving one's soul and the souls of one's family. This process was not only limited to the living, the Church sold Indulgences retro-actively for the deceased which were paid for by their living relatives<sup>166</sup>. In The 95 Theses, published in 1517, Luther condemned Indulgences and other Church practices in a literary attack on the Church's authority, claiming that 'The treasures of indulgences are nets with which one now fishes for the wealth of men'<sup>167</sup>,

160 Ibid.

161 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 44.

162 Ibid., 160.

163 Briggs and Burke, 16.

164 Ibid.

165 Financial donations made to the church in return for the temporary reprieve of one's sins, either for the donator or someone else on their behalf

166 “The pope does very well when he grants remission to souls in purgatory, not by the power of the keys, which he does not have, but by way of intercession for them. They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.” *Luther.de*.

167 “The 95 Theses”, *Luther.de*, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>.

As a result of the '95 Theses' and other works challenging the Church's authority and legitimacy Luther was summoned to Rome for questioning in 1518. During this process he claimed that, from a historicist perspective, the papacy was the Antichrist<sup>168</sup>. Luther was threatened with excommunication unless he recanted his hostile views on the papacy<sup>169</sup>, to which he responded by publicly burning the papal edicts<sup>170</sup>. A general assembly of the estates of the Holy Roman Empire, known as a Diet, was convened in the town of Worms in 1521 which declared:

...the said Martin Luther is to be considered an estranged member, rotten and cut off from the body of our Holy Mother Church. He is an obstinate, schismatic heretic, and...we ask and require that no one dare to compose, write, print, paint, sell, buy, or have printed, written, sold, or painted... such pernicious articles so much against the holy orthodox faith and against that which the Catholic Apostolic Church has kept and observed to this day...

And finally, after this edict has been published, we want all the books, writings, and pictures mentioned above to be publicly burned, including those under the name of any author that might be printed, written, or compiled in any language, wherever they may be found in our countries<sup>171</sup>.

Following the Diet Luther was intercepted and taken into protective custody in by Frederick III in Wartburg castle, from where he continued to write against the current state of the church and the papacy. In this same period English scholar William Tyndale was expressing equally heretical views, allegedly stating in conversation that he would have farm workers know more of the scriptures than the clergy<sup>172</sup>. In 1523 Tyndale was refused permission to translate the Bible into English so he moved to Germany to carry out the translation, completing it in 1525<sup>173</sup>. Tyndale's English-language Bibles were smuggled back into England and were resisted by the Church who publicly burned of any copies they found<sup>174</sup>. Eventually this

168 Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers 2* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 243.

169 "Condemning the Errors of Martin Luther: Exsurge Domine, Bull of Pope Leo X issued June 15, 1520," *Papal Encyclicals Online*, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo10/110exdom.htm>.

170 Martin Brecht, "Luther, Martin," translated by Wolfgang Katenz, in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2:463.

171 Dennis Bratcher, "The Edict of Worms (1521)," *The Voice*, last modified 2013, <http://www.crivoice.org/creededictworms.html>.

172 "Fox's Book of Martyrs, Chapter XII, The Life and Story of the True Servant and Martyr of God, William Tyndale," *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, accessed June 3, 2015, <http://www.ccel.org/f/foxe/martyrs/fox112.htm>.

173 One of the small ironies of this period is that the first full edition was printed in 1526 in Worms, the town where the Diet condemning Martin Luther was held, which was itself gradually converting to Lutheranism.

174 Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1999), 270.

included Tyndale himself; he was caught in 1536 and publicly strangled and burned at the stake<sup>175</sup>.

The lives (and deaths) of heretical authors like Martin Luther and William Tyndale and their competition against the Church's information monopoly would suggest that the Church was opposed to the idea of printing as a source of symbolic power which rivalled their own<sup>176</sup>. This is not necessarily true. The Church was initially supportive of printing as a technology, inviting printers into monasteries and using presses to reproduce liturgical and other supplementary religious texts if not the Bible itself. The problem the Church could not overcome was that it was impossible to control the output of the presses and printing businesses used for printing religious materials when they weren't in the Church's employ<sup>177</sup>. This was further compounded by the problem that the Church had to tread carefully when it came to making a public reaction to heretics like Tyndale and Luther as doing so would have a negative effect on its legitimacy as a source of the (known) world's symbolic power. Publishing an official lay-language Bible or responding to the claims of the Protestant heretics was too dangerous as it would encourage further interrogation of the source materials and expand the debates over their contents, yet maintaining silence would simply affirm the heretics' position through a lack of counter-argument<sup>178</sup>.

Prior to the availability of moveable type printing in Europe the works of Luther and Tyndale would have been limited to a small circulation of books or to whoever was able to physically hear them speak at sermons or lectures. Neither Luther nor Tyndale was the first to challenge the authority of the Church, the legitimacy of the papacy or the necessity of the clergy as an intermediary body between God and the rest of the population. The decentralised structure of multiple competing presses and printing organisations meant that any printed materials could be reproduced exponentially regardless of whether the author was incarcerated or dead. Furthermore the aforementioned medieval practice of public oration meant that it wasn't necessary for everyone in society to be able to read, only that they could get within earshot of someone who could<sup>179</sup>.

175 Michael Farris, *From Tyndale to Madison: How the Death of an English Martyr Led to the American Bill of Rights*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 37.

176 Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*, 52-53.

177 Ibid., 56.

178 Briggs and Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, 81.

179 Thompson, 60.



The effects of this expansion in printed written material were felt in areas beyond religion for a long period of time. Medical editor and translator Nicholas Culpeper released an unofficial translation of the guide for apothecaries in London, the *Pharmacopeia Londinensis* as 'The London Dispensatory' in 1649, in which he states:

...having published in print such a treatise of Herbs and Plants as my Country men may readily make use of, for their own preservation of health or cure of diseases [...] that so by the help of my book they may cure themselves, and never beholding to such Physicians as the inquiry of these times affords<sup>180</sup>.

Despite initially accepting printing as a means of spreading the word of God, the Church sought to manage or ultimately halt the printing industry's production and distribution of knowledge that they couldn't control. Unlike the scribes who had produced hand-written books and manuscripts beforehand, commercially-driven printing companies printed whatever would make them the most money. Communications technologies such as the printing press, as well as the Electric Telegraph and the internet which will be discussed later, are unfeeling mechanical or electrical devices; the printing presses were arrangements of metal and wood with no say over the words they reproduced or where they were distributed afterwards. Over time printing was adopted for the production of royally and ecclesiastically-approved Bibles<sup>181</sup> as well as to help aid the monarchs and governments of Europe manage their expanding empires; as the head of the Holy Roman Empire Charles V abandoned the traditional method of government through constant travelling and face-to-face meetings in favour of ruling through written documents. This saved a substantial amount of time, increased efficiency and centralised power but it was also a radical departure from the status quo, one which earned him the nickname 'The Paper King'<sup>182</sup>.

180 Emily Petch, "Nicholas Culpeper and his herbal," *Kew Royal Botanic Gardens*, April 13, 2015, <http://www.kew.org/discover/blogs/library-art-and-archives/nicholas-culpeper-and-his-herbal>.

181 Henry VIII's 'Great Bible' was the first authorised English-language Bible to be printed in England, and was largely based on Tyndale's own translation. *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible, 1525–1961*, ed. Arthur Sumner Herbert (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968), 127–129.

182 Briggs and Burke, 25.

### Copyright, the Church and the fight back for information control

Prior to the proliferation of the printing press the problems of intellectual property and protecting earnings from the sale of books and other produced materials did not exist. The process of manually duplicating a book took as long as the creation of the original source material, limiting the numbers of available copies that could be made in a given time. This meant that outside of bespoke commissioned works the potential profit from the commercial reselling of books produced in this manner was prohibitively low. As such anyone producing unauthorised copies of a book had to put in the same amount of work and required the same level of skill as someone producing one in an 'official' capacity<sup>183</sup>. The increase in speed of book production and reproduction had several profound effects on this balance of power. A printer could, on average, print a book over the course of a day. Compared to the two per year from the average scribe this made printing a profitable enterprise. The increased availability of printed books drove public demand for more books, often the more salacious/controversial the better<sup>184</sup>.

In 1557 the Stationers Company was chartered as one of the City of London's Livery Companies<sup>185</sup>. This gave the Company-owned printers in London and two universities exclusive rights to printing in England as well as the power to seize any works that had been printed outside of these restrictions; a literal right to copy, from which modern Copyright and other intellectual property measures, against which Anonymous has fought on several occasions. A contemporary example of the negative effects of this process in action today can be seen through analysing the availability of physical books on Amazon.com. The continuously extending duration of copyright terms<sup>186</sup> means that there are twice as many new books on sale from the 1890s than from the 1950s, despite the fact that there were significantly fewer books printed in the 1890s<sup>187</sup>. This has created a cultural black hole into

183 Thomas F. Cotter, "Gutenberg's Legacy: Copyright, Censorship and Religious Pluralism," *California Law Review* 91, no. 2 (2003): 325-326.

184 Ithiel de Sola Pool, *Technologies of Freedom: On free speech in an electronic age* (United States of America, Harvard University Press, 1983), 14.

185 Livery Companies were the trade unions of their day, controlling their professions in London and maintaining large property portfolios to this day.

186 The 1998 Copyright Term Extension Act (also known as the Mickey Mouse Protection Act due to Disney's heavy lobbying in favour of it) extended the duration of copyright to the life of the author and 70 years after their death, with corporate works being extended to 120 years after they were made or 95 years after they were published. This was criticised as a form of corporate welfare to stop Disney's earliest works becoming public domain.

187 Paul J. Heald, "How Copyright Keeps Works Disappeared," *Illinois Program in Law, Behavior and Social Science* Paper No. LBSS14-07; Illinois Public Law Research Paper No. 13-54, 3.

which many of the written works of the twentieth century have fallen, being no longer printed by the publishers or copyright holders but not freely available to read elsewhere.

In 1559 the Church published an expansive list of banned or prohibited works known as the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. The compilation and production of such a work shows how seriously the Church took the disruptive threat posed by printing, as does the length of time it was maintained. The *Index* was updated until 1948 and was abolished in 1966<sup>188</sup>. As well as the aforementioned works of Martin Luther and William Tyndale throughout its history authors who are considered the founders of intellectual thought have been listed in it. The *Index* has included the entire works of Thomas Hobbes, John Stuart Mill and the posthumous works of Benedict Spinoza. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Francis Bacon's *The Arrangement & General Survey of Knowledge* and David Hume's *The Social Contract* have also been included<sup>189</sup>, however none of Charles Darwin's works, including *On the Origin of Species* were ever listed in the *Index*.

The translation of Bibles into common vernaculars across Europe undermined the Church's position as a necessary barrier of arbitration between God and 'the people', lifting of the veil of mystery of both the literal words of the Bible and the deeper meanings behind them. This is not to say that the entire population of Europe became literate overnight; formal education was still beyond the reach of many. Printing made books easier, quicker and cheaper to produce however they were still an expensive item for much of the population who, as already discussed, were used to hearing texts spoken aloud rather than reading them for themselves. What mattered was that those that could read were able to supplant the clergy's position, allowing instant personal access to God on their own terms and asking their own questions. This process took place autonomously in households and other meeting spaces rather than in the church buildings themselves<sup>190</sup>. The Reformation was an upheaval of religious, political and social thought, as well as a contributory cause of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648); one of the most protracted and bloody conflicts in Western history, whose resulting peace treaties shaped the political and religious makeup of Europe we know today<sup>191</sup>. This is not to say that

188 "Index librorum prohibitorum, 1557-1966," *Fordham University*, accessed April 12, 2015, <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/indexlibrorum.asp>.

189 Ibid.

190 Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 167-168.

191 Peter H. Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy: A New History of the Thirty Years War* (London: Penguin, 2010), 787.

Anonymous' operations are anywhere near on the same scale as the political, religious and social upheavals brought by the Thirty Years War, however it is important to consider the role of individuals like Martin Luther and William Tyndale who contributed to them through undermining the narrative authority and symbolic power of the Church; challenging hierarchical narrative realities through mass-communication technologies which enabled them to share such counterpoints on a speed and scale beyond the reciprocity of their targets.

The contexts, scales and implications of the Reformation and the Thirty Years War are poles apart from Anonymous' online operations, however in the process of considering the former, in particular how technological developments altered our collective behaviours and shared constructions of reality we can see examples of the same friction between the personal and impersonal realities of the individual and the state/government/church. The Ressentiment which comes from the mismatched experiences of the individual in the face of such monolithic and enforced realities is what brought Anonymous together and at least broadly align against their chosen targets. Other more modern examples provide useful comparison to Anonymous' and by extension our own relationship with communications technologies themselves as well as further examples of the above friction between competing realities.

#### The proximity of history: the Electric Telegraph, Public Libraries and Facebook

The historical example of the printing press' role in the Reformation is not the only example of historical contexts which have a bearing on Anonymous' relationship to and use of the Internet, as well as the broader social/political implications thereof. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was another period of human communication accelerating through ambivalent machines which could be used for criminally or politically subversive actions. The industrial revolution brought a succession of technological advances which allowed information and people to travel further and faster than had been previously possible through steam power and eventually electricity and the early petrol engine. These changes were mirrored in English society; the dramatic shrinking of distance such developments facilitated forced previously the previously established world views of time and space to be fundamentally re-evaluated<sup>192</sup>. The development most relevant to this research is the invention and spread of the Electric Telegraph, a technology which meant messages could be sent through networks of wires around the world in a fraction of the time a physical letter would take to travel by land or sea.

192 Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*, 35.

The political and social consequences of this global communications network have thrown up concerns over privacy, surveillance and how technological development out-paces the legal frameworks which try to quantify them similar to those relative to the Internet (or its precursors) from the 1990s.

The speed of communications through the Electric Telegraph, as well as of its instalment around the world, not only forced a re-evaluation of distance and time but was the cause for public debates about privacy or the lack thereof when sending messages through a centralised network. Whereas books were printed by autonomous printing companies, their distribution was not centralised. The Electric Telegraph was a communication system which could only be accessed by paying to have one's messages translated into Morse code at a Telegraph station; at which point the message was sent to the next station along the line and so on until it reached its destination. Every message was read and re-transmitted by operators at every station in this chain. In Prussia many companies were legally required to keep copies of all messages sent through their lines, a state of affairs which was discussed in the British magazine *The Quarterly Review* in 1853:

Means should be taken to obviate one great objection – at present felt with respect to sending private communications by telegraph – the violation of all secrecy. For in any case half a dozen people must be cognizant of every word addressed by one person to another.

The clerks of the [telegraph companies] are sworn to secrecy, but we often write things that it would be intolerable to see strangers read before our eyes. This is a grievous fault in the telegraph, and it must be remedied by some means or other<sup>193</sup>.

Until 1865 only governments were allowed to send encoded messages and when this was scrapped it became a very popular activity<sup>194</sup>. This led to what can be considered the first cryptography wars; codes and ciphers adapting and changing to meet the ever-changing rules by the telegraph operating companies who charged more for words they perceived to be encoded. In 1894 it was decided by the companies that the only solution was to compile an official vocabulary of all permitted words. Any word not in the official vocabulary would be charged at the more expensive cipher rate. The first edition of the vocabulary contained

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>194</sup> Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-line Pioneers*, 111.

256,740 words of between five and ten letters drawn from each of the eight permitted languages. This was widely criticised because so many common words were omitted. The first edition was scrapped and a new vocabulary containing millions of words was planned. This too was abandoned when the impracticality of printing thousands of copies of the vast vocabulary and getting telegraph clerks to check every word of every message, became apparent<sup>195</sup>.

The propagation of one's political, religious or social beliefs has been achieved throughout history by controlling access to the reproduction and distribution of ideas and the technological systems which facilitate this process. The internet removes those barriers of entry in theory, however in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Internet access is far from universal<sup>196</sup>. The topic of global internet inequality is too large for this thesis to discuss in full so this chapter will focus on an element of this disparity visible through the example of Facebook's implementation of its free internet programme 'Free Basics'. According to Facebook, Free Basics it is a service that '...provides free access to basic internet services to a billion people all over the world'<sup>197</sup>. This translates to Facebook providing internet infrastructure in countries that either do not have it or whose existing infrastructure is under-developed and/or too expensive for the poorest strata of the population. The catch is that only a curated selection of web services and sites are made available through it

Free Basics has been successfully implemented in Africa and South East Asia, however it was met with heavy resistance in India. The widespread concerns over charging different rates for different levels of internet access led to legislation passing in February 2016 which made Free Basics illegal in its current form, based on the argument that the internet should be accessible on equal terms by everyone rather than being controlled by a single company<sup>198</sup>. The intention behind this legislation was to preserve internet neutrality, however it was passed without consulting those who would be affected the most by it; the poorest sections of Indian society who have no internet access whatsoever<sup>199</sup>. In April 2015 an open letter in the Hindustan

195 Ibid., 118.

196 "Internet users (per 100 people)," *The World Bank*, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2>.

197 "Free Basics Platform," *Facebook for Developers*, accessed March 12, 2016, <https://developers.facebook.com/docs/internet-org>.

198 "Facebook Shuts Down Free Basics in India," *Gadgets360*, posted February 11, 2016, <http://gadgets.ndtv.com/internet/news/facebook-shuts-down-free-basics-in-india-801052>.

199 Harichandan Arakali, "Free Basics or not, India's poor deserve to be connected to the internet," *Forbes*

Times<sup>200</sup> cited research on internet usage in Africa<sup>201</sup> and the Philippines<sup>202</sup> after the roll-out of ‘Facebook Zero’, a text-only version of Free Basics for older phones without larger touch screens or sophisticated networking capability. This research explores several sets of survey data which on the surface are statistically impossible or invalid; the surveyed populations in both countries claim to use Facebook more than the internet. This shows how ubiquitous social networks like Facebook have become as vectors of information control. Through platforms such as Free Basics there are substantial emerging digital markets where the common consensus equates Facebook with the internet itself who are unaware of the wider internet outside of its ‘walled garden’.

As seen with the printing press and the Electric Telegraph these circumstances and interfacing of communications technologies and information politics are not without historical precedent. Internet policy writer and founder of the first Swedish Pirate Party Rick Falkvinge has written about the problems of modern copyright law and its problematic application to the modern internet. One of these discussions revolves around the apparent hypocrisy of taking the position of supporting public libraries while at the same time denouncing sharing copyrighted material online as he claims that they are functionally the same thing. They both distribute information or entertainment with no direct compensation for the author on a per-access basis; the main differences between them are of speed, scale and efficiency<sup>203</sup>. If we look at the history of public libraries in England, particularly how they were created in the first place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there are political and social parallels which can be drawn between this process and the implementation of Free Basics/Facebook Zero. Falkvinge concludes that Free Basics and the 1850 Public Libraries Act are largely the same;

*India*, posted February 19, 2016, <http://forbesindia.com/article/special/free-basics-or-not-indias-poor-deserve-to-be-connected-to-the-internet/42371/1>.

200 “Dear Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook is not, and should not be the internet,” *Hindustan Times*, last modified April 17, 2015, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/tech/dear-mark-zuckerberg-facebook-is-not-and-should-not-be-the-internet/story-w9S3uhnEYVP8L85EtbTqCO.html>.

201 Christopher Mims, “Facebook’s plan to find its next billion users: convince them the internet and Facebook are the same,” *Quartz*, posted September 24, 2012, <http://qz.com/5180/facebooks-plan-to-find-its-next-billion-users-convince-them-the-internet-and-facebook-are-the-same/>.

202 Leo Mirani, “Millions of Facebook users have no idea they’re using the internet,” *Quartz*, posted February 9, 2015, <http://qz.com/333313/millions-of-facebook-users-have-no-idea-theyre-using-the-internet/>.

203 Rick Falkvinge, “You Can’t Defend Public Libraries and Oppose File-Sharing,” *Torrentfreak*, posted May 10, 2015, <https://torrentfreak.com/you-cant-defend-public-libraries-and-oppose-file-sharing-150510/>.



British Parliament at the time...saw the economic value in an educated and cultural populace, and passed a law allowing free public libraries in 1850...where the public could take part of knowledge and culture for free. In other words, they made explicit exceptions to the copyright monopoly for the benefit of public access to culture and knowledge<sup>204</sup>.

The parliamentary debates at the time appear to be creating a framework of publicly-funded institutions whose purpose is to provide previously inaccessible sources of information to the increasingly literate but economically disadvantaged urban population for their intellectual fulfilment and as a path to economic advancement:

...this Bill would provide the cheapest police that could possibly be established; and what was the use of education for the people, unless they were enabled to consult valuable works which they could not purchase for themselves? It was the duty of the House to promote all that had a tendency to bring the higher and the humbler classes together; but this could not be done unless the people had the assistance of those above them<sup>205</sup>.

The impetus to fund the creation of public libraries did not come from a sudden sense of altruism among the upper echelons of society but from a middle-class reaction to the perceived threat of revolt by the working classes in the 1840s. This perceived threat came from another example of the narrative friction as discussed above, in this case the state narratives of wealth and freedom and the personal reality of near-enslavement and starvation for many of the expanding urban working classes<sup>206</sup>. The reformers suggested that the creation of institutions such as public libraries would keep the working classes from engaging in drunkenness and vice, that the cost of building and stocking the libraries was less than the costs of policing urban crime and lost economic productivity:

Besides, it was not taxing to the extent represented by the hon. Member, because by encouraging habits which kept the working man from the public-house, they lessened the incentives to a dissolute life, and, consequently, to idleness and crime; which cost the country much more than all the libraries they could build under this Bill<sup>207</sup>.

Not only would public libraries maintain order and pacify the working classes, they would also fulfill the Utilitarian agenda of the reformers; selectively educating the working classes in

204 Ibid.

205 United Kingdom, *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Ser., Vol. CIX (1850), Col.841.

206 Paul Hamby and Ira Najowitz, "The Public Libraries Act of 1850: Utilitarian Pragmatism and Idealist Humanitarianism in Action," *Public & Access Services Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1999): 74.

207 United Kingdom, *Hansard, Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Ser., Vol. CIX (1850), Col.847.

a way which reinforced the existing social hierarchy. This approach also sought to channel the dissatisfaction of the urban poor against the upper class nobility and gentry, bypassing middle-class power and property rights to further the prosperity of market capitalism<sup>208</sup>, to '...control and direct the thoughts and actions of the workers—to win them as allies in the task of establishing a capitalist order [so they] would understand that it was in their best interests to become calm, orderly and acquiescent'<sup>209</sup>.

The way to achieve this was through establishing publicly accessible libraries containing literary materials reinforcing the social and economic status quo, but that would also 'negate the dissemination of radical political ideas among the working class by the replacement of dangerous literature with uncontroversial political and religious material'<sup>210</sup>. This combination would preserve the narrative of social and economic authority, control the working classes and secure their obedience or latent support against usurping the power of the upper classes.

Facebook's Free Basics is an example of McKenzie Wark's 'Hacker' and 'Vectoralist' information class warfare phenomenon in action: 'The arrest of the free flow of information means the enslavement of the world to the interests of those who profit from information's scarcity, the vectoral class. The enslavement of information means the enslavement of its producers to the interests of its owners...' <sup>211</sup> the criticisms against Free Basics in India were along similar lines; Facebook's provisioning of curated internet access is an example of the construction of an ideological apparatus to secure the 'political conditions of the reproduction of relations of production'<sup>212</sup>. This process took the form of ensuring the obedience of the working class as manufacturers of physical goods in the industrial 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Today this process takes the form of producers of information; the commodity<sup>213</sup> which social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter require to maintain their economic centrality and increase their turnover through the acquisition and selling of the information. In the West

208 Hamby and Najowitz, "The Public Libraries Act of 1850: Utilitarian Pragmatism and Idealist Humanitarianism in Action," 76.

209 Alistair Black, *A new history of the English public library: Social and intellectual contexts 1850-1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 64.

210 Hamby and Najowitz, 83.

211 McKenzie Wark, "A Hacker Manifesto [version 4.0]," 353.

212 "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays, translated by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 149.

213 Tim Jordan and Paul A. Taylor, *Hactivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a cause?* (London: Routledge, 2004), 31.

we chose to give this information, perhaps not entirely consciously, however under Free Basics/Facebook Zero the captive markets in Africa and South East Asia participate through an enforced ignorance, a mechanism which operates entirely to their detriment and to the benefit of the vectoral hubs operating them. Free Basics and the Public Libraries Act, despite being separated by over a hundred years and very different social and economic contexts both required the maintenance of a tautological narrative which reinforces such platforms as necessary to the conduct of our everyday lives.

This process of information control and subjugation of Wark's hacker class has roots older than the internet, but this chapter has discussed examples of how people have sought to counter these control mechanisms outside of the historical context of the internet. If we return to the internet itself we can see examples of this process from its own comparatively ancient history. The development of communication protocols like Usenet and Internet Relay Chat (IRC) in the mid to late 1980s were instrumental in the creation of the collective attitudes towards information freedom visible on 4chan and in Anonymous. The launch of file sharing services such as Napster in 1999, Limewire in 2000 and Kazaa in 2001 made sharing copyrighted materials and information free and accessible to a new generation of digital natives who, like Martin Luther, grew up with the existence of these file-sharing services as a given factor of their lives.

Napster and Kazaa were shut down after a few years of operation through comprehensive copyright infringement litigation<sup>214</sup>. In their short lives these services set the precedent for other file-sharing services to take their place, embedding themselves in the minds of generations of native internet users who knew how to get access to whatever they want without participating in the vectoralist monetisation of media/entertainment content. This shared cultural norm of free and easy access to whatever one wants online was one of the foundations of internet culture as it existed in the gap between technology and legislation which the internet of the mid 2000s certainly felt like. Websites like 4chan were established in this period and continued to develop this and other related cultural norms, which in turn became part of Anonymous' own original ethical compass.

214 Neal Pollack, "Spotify is the coolest music service you can't use," *Wired*, posted December 27, 2010, [http://www.wired.com/2010/12/mf\\_spotify/](http://www.wired.com/2010/12/mf_spotify/).

A 2013 report by the Intellectual Property Awareness Foundation found that Australian teenagers consider downloading films and television programmes from the internet as an ultimately victimless crime<sup>215</sup>. Despite efforts by the legal teams of film and television studios the world over copyrighted materials continue to be available for free online, at the same time films continue to break box office records, TV shows like *Game of Thrones* are immensely popular despite being the most pirated series ever<sup>216</sup>. A report by the European Intellectual Property Office also from 2013 found that 38% of young people across Europe see no problem with piracy for personal use<sup>217</sup>. These studies show that freely downloading media content is considered an acceptable source of information and entertainment, that there is reason to pay if said content can be obtained freely and easily. The widespread acceptance of media piracy as a social norm among the digitally native generational strata of a country like Australia which has numerous systems of internet filtering and censorship already in place<sup>218</sup>; systems which earned the government the attention of Anonymous on at least one occasion<sup>219</sup> and laws which have the potential to make even learning about encryption illegal<sup>220</sup>, show how pervasive such ideas have become. The collective output of all the hackers, printers, heretics and activists through the examples and case studies in this chapter show that the development of the Anonymous identity is a recent example of the constant tension between systems and hierarchies of information control and those who seek to subvert them in action.

Anonymous are not the only contemporary examples of such processes taking place and being amplified by the Internet. In 2010 programmer and activist Aaron Swartz, one of the creators of the RSS news feed, the creative commons license and Reddit downloaded large numbers of journals from JSTOR with the intention of making them publicly available<sup>221</sup>. This was in

215 Lori Flekser, "Film and TV Piracy: The Attitudes and Behaviours of 12-17-Year-Old Australians,"

*Education Technology Solutions*, posted January 31, 2014,

<http://educationtechnologysolutions.com.au/2014/01/31/film-and-tv-piracy-the-attitudes-and-behaviours-of-12-17-year-old-australians/>.

216 "Game of Thrones tops list of 2015's most pirated shows," *BBC News*, posted December 28, 2015,

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-35189131>.

217 "38% of Young EU Internet Pirates See Nothing Wrong in Piracy," *Torrentfreak*, posted April 8, 2016,

<https://torrentfreak.com/38-of-young-eu-internet-pirates-see-nothing-wrong-in-piracy-160407/>.

218 Glyn Moody, "Australia passes controversial anti-piracy web censorship law," *ArsTechnica*, posted June 22, 2015,

<http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2015/06/australia-passes-controversial-anti-piracy-web-censorship-law/>.

219 "Rudd website attacked in filter protest," *ABC News Australia*, last updated September 10, 2009,

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-09-10/rudd-website-attacked-in-filter-protest/1423834>.

220 Daniel Matthews, "Even Learning About Encryption in Australia Will Soon Be Illegal," *Lifehacker*, posted May 19, 2015,

<http://www.lifehacker.com.au/2015/05/even-learning-about-encryption-in-australia-will-soon-be-illegal/>.

221 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA v. AARON SWARTZ, filed July 14, 2011, filing 2,

accordance with Swartz's Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto which he had written several years earlier:

The world's entire scientific and cultural heritage, published over centuries in books and journals, is increasingly being digitized and locked up by a handful of private corporations...We need to take information, wherever it is stored, make our copies and share them with the world. We need to take stuff that's out of copyright and add it to the archive. We need to buy secret databases and put them on the Web. We need to download scientific journals and upload them to file sharing networks. We need to fight for Guerrilla Open Access<sup>222</sup>.

Swartz was arrested and faced with an unprecedented 30+ years in prison, a longer sentence than many murderers, terrorists and sex offenders had been given, a concept which will be discussed more in chapter 7. Swartz killed himself prior to being convicted in early 2013 and after JSTOR had dropped the charges. In 2016 this tension between the vectoralist owners of such works and the 'hackers' who create them was further exposed by the launch of Sci-Hub, a 'Pirate Bay for scientists' that eclipsed Swartz's efforts. Sci-Hub was created by Alexandra Elbakyan, a Russian-based Kazakh neuroscientist frustrated at either having to find illegal copies of journal articles or pay at least \$30 each for papers she needed to finish her thesis. Sci-Hub searches for ways into paid journal content through university proxy servers and anonymously donated login credentials. The site claims to have 48,000,000 academic papers available for free<sup>223</sup>, countering the vectoralist mechanism of turning an otherwise intangible product like information into a commercialised private property, forcing those who create such information to buy back their own produced culture from its owners<sup>224</sup>. The efforts of individuals like Swartz and Elbakyan to liberate information held to ransom by Wark's vectoralist class eclipse Anonymous' own more populous but less directly effective operations, a concept which will be discussed in more detail in chapters 8 and 9, however their actions have become political anchors and, in the case of Swartz their deaths have made them into martyrs for further operations or at least a motivator for other more generalised anti-authoritarian actions.

<http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/217117-united-states-of-america-v-aaron-swartz>.

222 "Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto," *Archive.org*, accessed July 15, 2016,

[http://archive.org/stream/GuerillaOpenAccessManifesto/Goamjuly2008\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/GuerillaOpenAccessManifesto/Goamjuly2008_djvu.txt).

223 Mary-Ann Russon, "Sci-Hub: Russian neuroscientist running 'Pirate Bay for scientists' with 48 million free academic papers," *International Business Times*, posted February 15, 2016,

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/sci-hub-russian-neuroscientist-running-pirate-bay-scientists-48-million-free-academic-papers-1543926>.

224 Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto [version 4.0]*, 347.

## Conclusion

The historical and contemporary examples discussed in this chapter show that new communication technologies have enabled people to circumvent structures of information control which operate through artificial scarcity or the propagation of frameworks which are beneficial to their owners rather than their audience/users. This intrinsic desire to shape our social and political realities on our own terms is a constant but latent psychosocial friction, the sparks from which are visible in the actions of Wark's 'hacker' class, which Anonymous is a part of. Activist identities such as Anonymous are cultural symptoms of a wider distrust in the intentions of the vectoralist class, who own and profit from a commodity anyone can produce but comparatively few have the means to direct.

Any discussion regarding the interface between politics, technology and society is risks enacting the assumptive fallacy that the socio-political events we see taking place on and as a result of the omnipresence of the internet are unprecedented. The friction between those who construct reality and those who do not has been a factor of human development throughout history. The printing press, the Electric Telegraph and the internet did not create this phenomenon but accelerated it; readjusting our collective realities and disrupting control and authorship of collective narrative reality through their infrastructure, acting as conduits for human ingenuity. These historical examples and case studies are not intended to suggest a causal lineage from Martin Luther to Anonymous, however this chapter has highlighted that the sentiment and motivations behind the latter are not without precedent. This chapter has also discussed the changing social behaviours and value systems that have come about as a result of this incremental acceleration of human communication and compound narrative construction. Institutions and systems of information control such as copyright are fundamentally at odds with the prevalent collective attitude of generations of digital natives who take easy access to whatever information they desire as a tacit factor of their lives. This attitude is built on generations of infrastructure development which accelerates beyond the speed of the law and the state but is in turn being vectoralised in a new form of social control and information authority. It is in this context of information class warfare that we can place Anonymous as an iteration of these compound social and political tensions.

The next chapter will continue to explore Anonymous' history from late 2007 and into early 2008; the tipping point where a capricious online community had snowballed into a hydra of increasingly politicised activism. This chapter will look at Project Chanology, Anonymous' breakout campaign against the Church of Scientology which catapulted them into the public eye and cemented their visual and linguistic lexicons but also amplified their flawed need for attention and feedback to perpetuate their operations. It will follow Chanology's rise and fall, detailing the first example of Anonymous' remit expanding to encompass a wider portfolio of causes such as defending Julian Assange and Wikileaks to keep up operational momentum and, more crucially, to maintain cultural and political relevance. Finally this chapter will briefly discuss some of the principle weapons in Anonymous' arsenal; DDOS programs like the Low Orbital Ion Cannon and their increasing use of botnets as the scale and resilience of their targets increased in turn.



#### Chapter Four – Project Chanology and Payback

This chapter will discuss one of the most important periods in Anonymous' history. From 2008-2011 Anonymous grew in notoriety and popularity through a series of dramatic protests and attacks on computer systems around the world. As well as being one of Anonymous' defining historical epochs, understanding this period of their history is vital for contextualising their more recent developments as well as further clarifying the reactionary and symbolic mechanics which drive those operating as part of the Anonymous identity. This chapter will begin by looking at the moment when Anonymous moved from the limited confines of inter-community harassment and inward-facing social activity towards operating openly in wider public and political spheres. As discussed in chapter 2 this gradual process was the result of 4 years of nebulous internet skirmishes whose targets were chosen for their susceptibility and the likelihood of providing dramatic and amusing reactions.

By the end of 2007 Anonymous in its early form received increasingly alarmist news reports denounced them as terrorists, 'hackers on steroids' and an 'internet hate machine'. This self-fulfilling prophecy showed that their capricious actions were having the desired effect, riling up their targets and the media and producing plenty of lulz at their expense. This surge of attention and hype also showed the untapped potential for much more potent lulz in the future; however the source of those lulz wasn't pre-planned or thought-out beforehand. The flashpoint which brought Anonymous worldwide attention and created the basis for their rise to Internet fame began in early 2008.

This chapter will explore Anonymous' meteoric rise to internet and real-world celebrity from 2008-2010. During this period Anonymous became increasingly bellicose in response to external world events and stimuli, a flawed yet potent pattern which will be discussed in more detail in chapters 7 and 8. This chapter will examine how the modern Anonymous we know today snowballed from a single post on /b/ questioning the Church of Scientology into an enigmatic protest movement; a process which cemented the Anonymous identity into the visual and linguistic frameworks which have defined the 'brand' but which have also restricted a previously nebulous and informal social framework. This will follow the rise and fall of Anonymous' breakout operation 'Project Chanology' as well as how its momentum was redirected as Anonymous found new enemies to redefine themselves against.

### Project Chanology – Anonymous steps into the light

By the end of 2007 the proto-Anonymous community was changing. The loosely-affiliated and often mutually hostile collection of websites which 4chan was a part of, including 7chan and other IRC channels were becoming aware of the unintentional positive reinforcement coming from the increasingly alarmist media coverage of their activities. This positive feedback provided the necessary stimulus to take their previously low-key trolling and inter-community bickering to a new and weaponised level. As with most of the major turning points in Anonymous' history, the flashpoint which kick-started Anonymous' metamorphosis into the verbose political franchise it has been known as since was a reaction to external events outside the control of the proto-Anonymous community rather than through an internal agenda or pre-determined collective policy. On January 14 2008 a video was posted on YouTube which showed film actor Tom Cruise talking about Scientology<sup>225</sup>. In the nearly ten minute long video he makes a range of claims about the Church of Scientology. These claims range from Scientology being the principle authority on drug and criminal rehabilitation, mental health, that Scientologists have the ability to "...create new and better realities and improve conditions..."<sup>226</sup> and other nebulous statements about improving the world through 'tech' and 'KSW'; all against a looping refrain from the soundtrack to Mission Impossible, one of Tom Cruise's most well-known roles. This video was originally leaked by former Scientologist Patty Pieniadz in the hope that others would upload it to embarrass and expose Scientology as a dangerous cult<sup>227</sup>. The Church of Scientology insisted the video was removed from YouTube on grounds of copyright infringement and illegal distribution of intellectual property<sup>228</sup>. This was followed was a back-and-forth of uploads and take-downs across the internet; news aggregate website Gawker openly defended the right to publish the video as newsworthy material<sup>229</sup>.

225 Aleteuk, "Tom Cruise Scientology Video - ( Original UNCUT )," YouTube video, 9:34, posted January 17, 2008, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFBZ\\_uAbxS0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFBZ_uAbxS0).

226 Ibid.

227 Olson, *We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous and the Global Cyber Insurgency*, 18.

228 Robert Vamosi, "Anonymous hackers take on the Church of Scientology," *Cnet*, posted January 25, 2008, <http://www.cnet.com/uk/news/anonymous-hackers-take-on-the-church-of-scientology/>.

229 Nick Denton, "The Cruise Indoctrination Video Scientology Tried To Suppress," *Gawker*, posted January 15, 2008, <http://gawker.com/5002269/the-cruise-indoctrination-video-scientology-tried-to-suppress>.

The Church of Scientology was no stranger to critics. The hacker group known as 'The Cult of the Dead Cow' launched attacks against the Church of Scientology in the mid-1990s<sup>230</sup>. In 2005 an episode of the animated series South Park openly presented what is allegedly the Church of Scientology's most secret and dangerous information which can only be read after rising through the ranks and paying large sums of money to do so. According to these materials, every aspect of human misery can be attributed to the brainwashed souls of aliens who were blown up inside volcanoes on earth millions of years ago by a galactic despot named Xenu. These souls have roamed the world and attached themselves to human beings throughout history; the only way to us to be rid of them is to go through the Church of Scientology's 'clearing' processes<sup>231</sup>. This story was presented with the words 'This is what Scientologists actually believe' on screen throughout<sup>232</sup>:



In isolation, a video being removed from YouTube was not a watershed moment. Since the passing of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) in 1998 copyrighted content was being removed or blocked across the internet, beyond just YouTube videos. A single post by

230 "A statement from CULT OF THE DEAD COW/cDc communications," *Cult of the Dead Cow*, posted June 4, 1995, <http://www.cultdeadcow.com/news/scientology.txt>.

231 Tony Ortega, "Scientology Mythbusting with Jon Atack: Xenu the Galactic Overlord, Part 1!," *The Underground Bunker*, posted March 9, 2013, <http://tonyortega.org/2013/03/09/scientology-mythbusting-with-jon-attack-xenu-part-1/>.

232 Tony Ortega, "Ten years ago, 'South Park' rocked Scientology in a way it's never recovered from," *The Underground Bunker*, posted November 3, 2015, <http://tonyortega.org/2015/11/03/ten-years-ago-south-park-rocked-scientology-in-a-way-its-never-recovered-from/>.

an anonymous 4chan user in early 2008 denouncing the Church of Scientology turned this otherwise fleeting issue into a flashpoint which emergently drove Anonymous' reach beyond their previously introspective purview:

I think its time for /b/ to do something big.  
People need to understand not to fuck with /b/, and talk about nothing for ten minutes, and expect people to give their money to an organization that makes absolutely no fucking sense.  
I'm talking about "hacking" or "taking down" the official Scientology website.  
It's time to use our resources to do something we believe is right.  
It's time to do something big again, /b/.  
Talk amongst one another, find a better place to plan it, and then carry out what can and must be done.  
It's time, /b/<sup>233</sup>.

The discussion following this post moved on to the best ways to attack the Church of Scientology. However as with the examples of discussion on 4chan in chapter 2, it is important to remember that this was far from a universal rallying call to arms. Replies ranged from the positive:

'This is the first step in something larger, something epic'.

To the much more negative:

mission impossible  
A random image board cannot take down a pseudo-religion with the backing of wealthy people and an army of lawyers.  
Even if every person who has browsed /b/ ONCE joined in on a mass invasion it would still amount to nothing.  
Plus if anyone got found out they would have 500 lawyers up their ass before they could ssay(sic) "litigation"  
Scientologists are famous for hounding critics<sup>234</sup>.

Nevertheless, the following day discussions over 4chan, 7chan and its affiliated IRC channels turned to creating a plan of action which would go beyond the scope of previous small operations against equally small targets. This was what the developing Anonymous identity needed; a lulz-worthy nemesis for the community to align against and an irresistible target to deploy their tools and techniques of decentralised harassment against<sup>235</sup>. A video was posted

<sup>233</sup> Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*, 55.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>235</sup> D. C. Elliott, "Anonymous Rising," 100.

on YouTube a week later on January 21 2008. This video, entitled ‘Message to Scientology’, showed stock footage of a cloudy urban landscape while an automated voice read out the following statement<sup>236</sup>:



Hello, leaders of Scientology. We are Anonymous.

Over the years, we have been watching you. Your campaigns of misinformation; your suppression of dissent; your litigious nature, all of these things have caught our eye. With the leakage of your latest propaganda video into mainstream circulation, the extent of your malign influence over those who have come to trust you as leaders has been made clear to us. Anonymous has therefore decided that your organization should be destroyed; for the good of your followers, for the good of mankind and for our own enjoyment we shall proceed to expel you from the Internet and systematically dismantle the Church of Scientology in its present form. We recognize you as serious opponents and do not expect our campaign to be completed in a short time frame.

However, you will not prevail forever against the angry masses of the body politic. Your choice of methods, your hypocrisy, and the general artlessness of your organization have sounded its death knell.

You have nowhere to hide, because we are everywhere.  
You will find no recourse in attack, because for each of us that falls ten more will take his place.

We are cognisant of the many who may decry our methods as parallel to those of the Church of Scientology, those who espouse the obvious truth that your organization

236 ChurchOfScientology, “Message to Scientology,” YouTube video, 2:03, posted January 21, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCbKv9yiLiQ>.

will use the actions of Anonymous as an example of the persecution of which you have so long warned your followers.

This is acceptable to Anonymous. In fact, it is encouraged. We are your SP's<sup>237</sup>. Over time, as we merge our pulse with that of your Church, the suppression of your followers will become increasingly difficult to maintain. Believers will become aware that salvation needn't come at the expense of their livelihood. They will become aware that the stress and the frustration that they feel is not due to us, but a source much closer to them. Yes, we are SP's but the sum of suppression we could ever muster is eclipsed by that of your own RTC.

Knowledge is free.  
We are Anonymous.  
We are legion.  
We do not forgive.  
We do not forget.  
Expect us<sup>238</sup>.

The collective memory of the internet operates at two extremes; at one end governments collect and store data about their citizens for security purposes, companies like Facebook build their profits on gathering and selling the lives of their users for marketing. At the other end information disappears without a trace. Topics on 4chan fall off the bottom of the last page of a board, online news stories are pruned due to their age rather than relevance and politically embarrassing materials quietly disappear quicker and easier than can be done to the printed word<sup>239</sup>. In the case of Anonymous, much of the information about them sits at the latter end of this spectrum. Impossible volumes of daily 4chan and IRC activity from this period were either never recorded in the first place or have succumbed to this inevitable decay themselves.

The surviving orphaned chat logs, news articles and YouTube videos from the period have established a footprint as citable source materials through their refraction around the internet; being re-uploaded to new websites/accounts time and again. Source materials like the 'Message to Scientology' present many questions about this period of Anonymous' development in late 2007/early 2008. As an activist who built a career out of electronic disobedience Gregg Housh was involved in Anonymous' formative process and his testimonies provide answers to a few of them. He paints the creation process for the 'Message

237 "Suppressive Persons" - a term the Church of Scientology uses for those it sees as a threat.

238 ChurchOfScientology. "Message to Scientology." YouTube video.

239 Heather Brooke, *The Revolution Will Be Digitised*, 14.



to Scientology' as a microcosm of the idea of Anonymous as a whole:

There were five of us at that point, and one guy said he was a writer, one was a proofreader, and I had some good ideas for structure. We started pounding it out, and by the end it looked more like a video script than a press release. Then the other two guys said they were into video and had the tools, and one of them said they had some creepy cloud footage. The next thing you know, we have 'Message to Scientology' up on YouTube on the 21st<sup>240</sup>.

The 'Message to Scientology' was one of a handful of events which instigated a major change in the character of Anonymous' visual language and therefore their identity. This change was far from a smooth or straightforward process. On the one hand the Message to Scientology served as a rallying cry, mobilising Anons all over the world in a way previous trolling campaigns had not achieved. It created a series of visual and linguistic templates that hardened a previously amorphous community through directing their attention to a relatively straightforward target who were a more morally acceptable target than random bloggers and communities who happened to fall into Anonymous' cross-hairs. The beguiling and dramatic language of this template was so effective that it managed to trap those already acting as part of Anonymous inside it.

This was the start of a long-standing friction between two major bodies within Anonymous. On the one hand was the original /b/ population who were driven by the hedonistic desire to troll and harass for the fun of it while on the other were the newer and more serious and cause-oriented 'moralfags'<sup>241</sup>. This group would come to dominate Anonymous' political output, fundamentally changing its outward character and public image; however this process was still in its infancy at this point in Anonymous' history.

Following the 'Message to Scientology' Anonymous kicked off the opening skirmishes of an internet media and public relations war with both publishing online statements containing claims and counter-claims of imminent victory<sup>242</sup>. As was seen with the attacks on Hal Turner and Habbo Hotel those operating as Anonymous launched a campaign of harassment and

240 Chris Faraone, "Battling Scientology." *The Boston Phoenix*, posted October 23, 2008, <http://thephoenix.com/Boston/News/69998-Battling-Scientology/>.

241 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower*, *Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*, 62.

242 Ryan Singel, "War Breaks Out Between Hackers and Scientology - There Can Be Only One," *Wired*, posted January 23, 2008, <http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2008/01/anonymous-attac/>.



interference including the now standard tactics of making phone calls and launching denial of service attacks to take servers offline, black-faxing<sup>243</sup> and manipulating Google search statistics; making searches for 'dangerous cult' and other similar terms instead bringing up results for Scientology<sup>244</sup>. Although these attacks were disruptive and entertaining for the perpetrators they were unlikely to '...systematically dismantle the Church of Scientology in its present form'.

Considering the inevitable collapse of interest and engagement in Anonymous' previous actions it would have been reasonable to expect the decentralised campaign against the Church of Scientology to also lose momentum in a short period of time, as seen in the examples discussed in chapter 2 which ground to a halt as the perpetrators lost interest or moved on to other targets. This was due to the clear differences between their apocalyptic rhetoric and the limited impact Anonymous' efforts were having on their targets. What made Anonymous' attacks on the Church of Scientology different was how much they were the perfect nemesis for each other; Anonymous was a nebulous and tautological identity, holding nothing sacred. Those identifying with it didn't take themselves seriously in the slightest. On the other hand the Church of Scientology had a reputation as rigid and hierarchical organisation with strict information control systems that was not afraid to use any means necessary to control the lives of its followers.

This conflict of representation and public relations had grown into a relatively organised nascent protest organisation which identified itself through the portmanteau Project Chanology. Websites such as Whyweprotest.net were set up as communication hubs for co-ordinating protests, distributing information and sharing stories. As of 2016 the site is still active although it is a shadow of its former self with reduced user traffic and has spread out to cover other issues than Scientology.

243 Sending an entirely black page to the target's fax machine. This wastes large amounts of ink, blocks any legitimate fax messages from coming through. The only option the target has is to turn the machine off; the analogue equivalent of a denial of service attack.

244 Ryan Singel, "War Breaks Out Between Hackers and Scientology - There Can Be Only One," *Wired*.

On January 27 2008 another video was posted on YouTube. Entitled 'Call to Action'<sup>245</sup> and featuring more stock footage of cloudy skies, the same automated voice program read out the following:

It has come to the attention of Anonymous that there are a number of you out there who do not clearly understand what we are or why we have undertaken our present course of action.

Contrary to the assumptions of the media, Anonymous is not simply "a group of super hackers". Anonymous is a collective of individuals united by an awareness that someone must do the right thing, that someone must bring light to the darkness, that someone must open the eyes of a public that has slumbered for far too long.

Among our numbers you will find individuals from all walks of life – lawyers, parents, IT professionals, members of law enforcement, college students, veterinary technicians and more. Anonymous is everyone and everywhere. We have no leaders, no single entity directing us – only the collective outrage of individuals, guiding our hand in the current efforts to bring awareness.

We want you to be aware of the very real dangers of Scientology. We want you to know about the gross human rights violations committed by this cult. We want you to know about Lisa McPhearson. We want you to know about former members of Scientology's private navy, SeaOrg, who were forced to have abortions so that they could continue in service to the church. We want you to know about Scientology's use of child labor and their gulags. We want you to know about Operation Freakout and Paulette Cooper. We want you to know about Operation Snow White and Scientology's efforts to infiltrate the government of the United States of America.

We want you to know about all of these things that have been swept under the rug for far too long. The information is out there. It is yours for the taking. Arm yourself with knowledge. Be very wary of the 10th of February. Anonymous invites you to join us in an act of solidarity. Anonymous invites you to take up the banner of free speech, of human rights, of family and freedom. Join us in protest outside of Scientology centers world wide.

We are Anonymous.

We are Legion.

We do not forgive.

We do not forget.

We will be heard.

Expect us.

The first half of this statement is public relations management and damage control. The Church of Scientology's anti-DDOS software blocked 'bad' traffic and allowed normal traffic through; one of the Chanology organisers believed they had found a way around this and

245 ChurchOfScientology, "Call to Action," YouTube video, 2:02, posted January 27, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrkchXCzY70>.

distributed the IP address to be attacked without checking its destination first, leading Anonymous to attack the 'Etty Hillesum Lyceum' school in the Netherlands instead of a Scientology server<sup>246</sup>. The second half is a concentrated list pre-existing controversies and embarrassing issues for the Church of Scientology. None of the examples mentioned were great revelations in and of themselves however they were used as hooks to encourage the viewer to engage with the subject and investigate them for themselves. The date mentioned in the statement, February 10, is another example of Anonymous' practice of exposing their targets' most embarrassing facts; it being the birthday of Lisa McPherson, a Scientologist who died under mysterious and disputed circumstances in 1995<sup>247</sup>. This date was near enough to Lisa McPherson's birthday to be relevant to the cause while allowing for those involved enough time to plan for a more serious and physical protest.

Armed with billboards and signs bearing a perplexing mixture of pop-culture references and statements about the Church of Scientology, protesters gathered at Church of Scientology buildings in major cities<sup>248</sup> around the world<sup>249</sup> on February 10, 'From...Australia – to Toronto, London, Dublin, Texas and New York City – a simultaneous, worldwide assault on the Church of Scientology was launched...' <sup>250</sup>



246 Ryan Singel, "Anonymous Hackers Shoot For Scientologists, Hit Dutch School Kids," *Wired*, posted January 25, 2008,

<http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2008/01/anonymous-hacke/>.

247 Faraone, *Battling Scientology*, The Boston Phoenix.

248 Fruzsina Eördögh, "The Video That Made Anonymous," *Motherboard*, posted January 22, 2014, <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/the-video-that-made-anonymous>.

249 "Project Chanology," *Know Your Meme*, last modified November 6, 2015, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/events/project-chanology>.

250 D. C. Elliott, "Anonymous Rising," 102.



The first Scientology protests were a catalyst which cemented the imagery and iconography of Anonymous as we know it today. The Church of Scientology had a reputation for pursuing its detractors, an experience highlighted by BBC journalist John Sweeney's 2007 documentary about the Church<sup>251</sup>. This meant that a form of physical obfuscation was needed while the protesters were outside Scientology premises<sup>252</sup>. The 2006 release of the film adaptation of Alan Moore's graphic novel 'V for Vendetta' and the subsequent merchandising of the titular character's Guy Fawkes mask provided a source of uniform masks while making a political statement that would resonate with their constituent population. The importance of the titular anonymous and erudite character and his revenge against an oppressive and authoritarian near-future British government will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter; as well as how the adoption of this particular element of popular culture is not as straightforward as it appears. In practical terms the masks were widely available in film/comic merchandise shops around the world. They were relatively inexpensive and completely covered the wearer's face making them a sound choice both tactically as a counter-intelligence tool against the Church

251 "John Sweeney revisits the Church of Scientology," *BBC News*, last modified September 26, 2010, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front\\_page/newsid\\_9032000/9032278.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_9032000/9032278.stm).

252 "Masked protesters hike up pressure on Scientologists," *The Scotsman*, last modified February 10, 2008, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/scotland/top-stories/masked-protesters-hike-up-pressure-on-scientologists-1-1154093>.

of Scientology. They were also thematically appropriate as a representation of the collective cultural values of the internet that Anonymous was expressing through such protests taking place.

In this case the prediction that “if anyone got found out they would have 500 lawyers up their ass before they could say(sic) “litigation”” turned out to be well-founded. The response from the Church of Scientology in this war of words labelled Anonymous as ‘cyberterrorists’, claiming that Anonymous ‘publicly proclaimed its guiding materials to be the Communist Manifesto and Mein Kampf. Quite obviously, this group is not just anti-Scientology; it is anti-freedom of religion, anti-free speech and anti-American’<sup>253</sup>. This statement shows the Church using the same tactics of baseless hyperbole as Anonymous themselves, but painting the Church as victims of Communist-Nazi hackers who hate freedom and America. In response to further anti-Scientology protests in March 2008 a video made by the Church of Scientology titled ‘Anonymous Exposed – Religious Hate Crimes and Terrorism’<sup>254</sup> claimed that Anonymous:

...made or encouraged over 8000 harassing or threatening phone calls, 3.6 million malicious emails, 141 million hits against church websites, 10 acts of vandalism, 22 bomb threats and 8 death threats against members and officials of the Church of Scientology<sup>255</sup>.

The response from existing anti-Scientology activists was a mixture of support and warnings of caution. The head and founder of long-running anti-Scientology website Xenu.net, Andreas Heldal-Lund, commented that attacking the Church in such a bellicose way would give them justification to claim that they are being persecuted, legitimising their litigious response<sup>256</sup>. Journalist and Scientology critic Mark Bunker offered support for Anonymous but asked that their methods be toned down to remain within the boundaries of legality. This was also to prevent the Church from claiming to be victims of persecution, despite all the evidence to the contrary that Anonymous and others were bringing to light. As a result of statements such as

253 “Church of Scientology responds to protest plans,” *Tampa Bay Times*, posted February 7, 2008, [http://www.sptimes.com/2008/02/07/Southpinellas/Church\\_of\\_Scientology.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2008/02/07/Southpinellas/Church_of_Scientology.shtml).

254 John Leyden, “Scientologists fight back against Anonymous,” *The Register*, posted March 17, 2008, [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2008/03/17/scientology\\_anonymous\\_round\\_three/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2008/03/17/scientology_anonymous_round_three/).

255 The Scientology Video, “Anonymous Exposed – Religious Hate Crimes and Terrorism,” YouTube video, 4:22, posted March 12, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Covp7yUKAiQ>.

256 Andreas Heldal-Lund, “DDOS attacks on Scientology,” *Xenu.net*, posted January 22, 2008, [http://www.xenu.net/news/20080122-OC\\_pressrelease.html](http://www.xenu.net/news/20080122-OC_pressrelease.html).



these Bunker became known as 'Wise Beard Man'<sup>257</sup> for his intelligent advice following the initial wave of protests.

Comparing the apocalyptic rhetoric of the 'Message to Scientology' and what actually took place on the ground; crowds of masked people waving banners outside Scientology premises rather than the destruction of the Church of Scientology or its removal from the internet, then Project Chanology can be seen as a tactical failure. It was clear that Anonymous was never going to be able to destroy a global organisation such as the Church of Scientology. The protests may have helped spread the message of anti-Scientology activists like Andreas Heldal-Lund and Mark Bunker however Anonymous' messaging was wrapped in the cryptic language of 4chan and internet culture.

The creation and execution of Project Chanology gave those involved experience of coordinating protest campaigns which mixed online and physical actions, as well as of unifying for a purpose more politically significant than their own amusement. The February 2008 protests were the first in a series of events which took place around the world over the next 12-18 months. In March 2008 protesters gathered at the Church of Scientology's Los Angeles premises<sup>258</sup>. In April 2008 protesters gathered around the world to challenge the Church of Scientology's policy of disconnecting people from their families if they disagreed with Church policies or wanted them to leave<sup>259</sup>. At a protest outside a London Scientology building in May 2008 a 15 year-old protester was told to remove the word 'cult' from his protest sign by police as he was breaching section 5 of the Public Order Act; displaying a 'threatening, abusive or insulting' sign<sup>260</sup>. Despite the frequency of Chanology protests in the first six months, by August 2008 there were signs of the ruinous entropy which would continue to hamper Anonymous' operational capability both for Project Chanology and in the future. In a video posted on August 1 2008 echoes sentiments which intermittently appear

257 "Mark Bunker/Wise Beard Man," *Know Your Meme*, last modified July 28, 2010, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/mark-bunkerwise-beard-man>.

258 David Ferrell, "'Anonymous' vs. Scientology: Group Targets 'Church' Headquarters," *LA Weekly*, posted March 17, 2008, <http://www.laweekly.com/news/anonymous-vs-scientology-group-targets-church-headquarters-2152519>.

259 "Masked protesters rally against Scientology," *CTV News*, posted April 12, 2008, <http://www.ctvnews.ca/masked-protesters-rally-against-scientology-1.288760>.

260 John Bingham, "Church of Scientology: Boy faces court for 'cult not religion' placard," *The Telegraph*, posted May 21, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1997376/Boy-faces-court-for-Scientology-placard.html>.

throughout Anonymous' future history calling for a return to 'the original unrelenting Anonymous' in the face of:

...Project Chanology becoming polluted by people who are judgemental of our ideology, and serve the wills of special interest groups concerned for their own survival, and not the survival of Anonymous...We ask those who have left Project Chanology to return and reclaim it. Bring back the lulz, bring back the hate machine, and do not let some rather forceful detractors sway you<sup>261</sup>.

Despite this downturn Project Chanology wasn't dead yet. In December 2008 the film première for *Valkyrie*, starring Tom Cruise and depicting the attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler by German army officer Claus von Stauffenberg in 1944, was held at a closed location in New York instead of a large-scale red carpet event. This was a deliberate measure to minimise the impact of any Anonymous-led anti-Scientology protests which were expected to take place<sup>262</sup>. At the film's German première one Anon persuaded Tom Cruise to sign his Guy Fawkes mask on the red carpet<sup>263</sup>.

Almost a year after Project Chanology began, in January 2009 a shirtless Anon was filmed executing 'Operation SlickPubes'<sup>264</sup>; covering himself in a mixture of Vaseline, pubic hair and toenail clippings before running into a New York Scientology building and rubbing himself on anything and anyone he could<sup>265</sup>, while other events in were planned throughout January and February to mark Project Chanology's anniversary<sup>266</sup>. By this point however the frequency of protests against the Church of Scientology and the number of participants involved begin to fall. Chanology had been running for almost a year and with no realistically attainable end-game or victory scenario the collective interest in pursuing it had run out, or those involved had moved on to sources of fresh lulz or newer political campaigns.

261 ChurchOfScientology, "Reclamation: Phase Three," YouTube video, 2:20, posted August 1, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPoIGXJJmnM>.

262 Courtney Hazlett, "Group bungles protest at 'Valkyrie' premiere," *Today*, last modified December 15, 2008, <http://www.today.com/id/28240738#.V6iQTSgrKUK>.

263 BerlinAnon46, "Tom Cruise signs Anonymous-mask – pwnd in 39 secs (0:19-“No masks”),” YouTube video, 0:58, posted January 20, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tG7WD6VAmJ4>.

264 Stryker, *Epic Win For Anonymous: How 4chan's Army Conquered the Web*, 248.

265 Kerry Burke, "Greasy vandal in hate crime vs. Scientology," *New York Daily News*, posted January 15, 2009, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/greasy-vandal-hate-crime-scientology-article-1.423223>.

266 John Leyden, "Anonymous celebrates first anniversary of Scientology protests," *The Register*, posted January 6, 2009, [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2009/01/06/anon\\_first\\_anniversary/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2009/01/06/anon_first_anniversary/).



This degradation of operational momentum highlights one of Anonymous' most serious flaws. Project Chanology was not an internally-planned program to promote religious freedom. As a reactionary protest Project Chanology needed the Church of Scientology in order to legitimise itself as an opposing force. The Church of Scientology's defensive stance positioned itself as the victim which further reinforced this fallacy. The louder Anonymous called for their destruction, the more the Church was needed to maintain Chanology's operational momentum. Anonymous' operations prior to Chanology also followed this template; reacting to external events rather than planning them as part of an internal or proactive policy. This does not mean that Project Chanology was a total failure. Project Chanology achieved something that critics like Mark Bunker or The Cult of the Dead Cow had not managed in the preceding decade; opening the cracks and gaps in the Church's information control structures. This enabled others to express their own anti-Scientology positions without fear of reciprocity to the point where such criticism is now no longer seen as dangerous or taboo<sup>267</sup>.

Anonymous' need for a target provides a second explanation for why Project Chanology declined and ultimately ceased. The Church of Scientology became aware of and began to counter an internet phenomenon known as the Streisand Effect. In 2002 photographer Kenneth Adelman was part of the California Coastal Records Project, documenting the California coastline and how it was changing over time. The photographs he took while working for the project were posted online for anyone to see. Several of the photographs in the collection included singer Barbara Streisand's coastal house. In 2003 she sued the California Coastal Records Project for privacy invasion and breaching paparazzi laws<sup>268</sup>. Prior to the lawsuit the pictures of Barbara Streisand's house had been viewed 6 times, two of the views being from her legal team. After news of the lawsuit became public the picture was viewed 420,000 over the following month<sup>269</sup>.

Project Chanology was another case of the Streisand Effect in action, counting on any attempts to remove information from the internet drawing more attention than if it had been left alone. Another more recent example of this in action came from the French domestic

267 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*, 78.

268 "Barbara Streisand Sues to Suppress Free Speech Protection for Widely Acclaimed Website," *California Coastal Records Project*, accessed February 15, 2013, <http://www.californiacoastline.org/streisand/lawsuit.html>.

269 Paul Rogers, "Streisand's home becomes hit on Web," *The Mercury News*, posted June 24, 2003, <http://www.californiacoastline.org/news/sjmerc5.html>.

security service (DCRI) attempting to remove information from Wikipedia in 2013. The DCRI instructed Wikipedia to remove a page giving the location of one of their secret facilities on the grounds that the information on this page was classified. The subsequent media coverage of the legal back-and-forth between Wikipedia and the DCRI meant that the page in question became the most viewed French language page on Wikipedia at the time; beating the pages for both the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks and France's chief tax collector Jérôme Cahuzac who was facing charges of tax avoidance<sup>270</sup>. It is impossible to say for certain but it is entirely possible that had the Church of Scientology left the video of Tom Cruise alone, after a brief period of being echoed and around the social media sphere it would have been quickly forgotten in favour of the next viral trend; preventing an embarrassing media battle the formation of Anonymous as we know them today.

Anonymous and the Church and Scientology were both playing the same game, goading their opponent into making a mistake which would be held up as a trophy to their respective audiences. Eventually the Church of Scientology stopped playing along; with a more reserved approach to Anonymous' actions the Church let Anonymous' energy burn itself out against a wall of silence. This was something that Anonymous' previous opponents had failed to realise. Without the Church of Scientology as a source of the stimuli and ammunition Anonymous needed to reinforce the narrative of a common and morally justifiable enemy enthusiasm for Project Chanology drained away. This was further compounded by the aforementioned schism between the old guard and the 'moralfags' which was now becoming more prevalent as Anonymous found itself without a target for everyone involved to attack.

Project Chanology made Anonymous popular as the new Robin Hoods of the internet; enigmatic, capricious and romantic hackers taking down websites and making headlines all over the world; robbing from the McKenzie Wark's 'vectoralist' rich and giving to the 'hacker' poor. The problem lay in a fundamental difference of opinion regarding Anonymous' direction and core principles. On the one hand Anonymous were the 'final boss[es] of the internet'<sup>271</sup>; expert trolls to whom nothing was sacred, who reflected every insult and attack by

270 Megan Geuss, "Wikipedia editor allegedly forced by French intelligence to delete "classified" entry," *ArsTechnica*, posted April 6, 2013, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2013/04/wikipedia-editor-allegedly-forced-by-french-intelligence-to-delete-classified-entry/>.

271 "Anonymous: final boss of the internet?" *Romhack*, posted October 8, 2008, <http://www.romhack.net/index.php?post/2008/10/03/Anonymous:-final-boss-of-the-Internet>.

adopting the insults of their enemies for maximum lulz. On the other Anonymous' increasingly serious political rhetoric and popularity drew in cause-orientated and anti-Scientologist activists whose methods and temperaments were at odds with the ideals of 'old Anonymous'<sup>272</sup>.

### The snowballing of Payback and Avenge Assange

By the end of 2009 Chanology was over. The Church of Scientology had stopped fuelling the Streisand Effect, killing Anonymous' reactionary feedback loop through keeping quiet and letting them burn out and fall upon each other instead. While Anonymous' reactionary position is fundamentally flawed, it makes them politically nimble and able to adapt to world events very quickly. In 2010 a new source of reactionary outrage snowballed into another rolling campaign which marked a further shift away from the lulz towards more serious 'moralfaggotry'. In an interview with the Sydney Morning Herald in September 2010 the managing director of an Indian company working for the Bollywood film industry stated that his firm Aiplex had been hired by many of the biggest studios in the Indian film industry to find and remove illegal copies of their films from file-sharing websites<sup>273</sup>. His company sent cease-and-desist letters to pirates but those who did not respond were subject to Denial of Service attacks. The list of targets included The Pirate Bay, a prolific file-sharing website which by 2010 was the most visited source for illegally downloading films, music, television series and other entertainment media<sup>274</sup>. The Pirate Bay remains a constant thorn in the side of major copyright holders to this day who play a lengthy and expensive game of internet whack-a-mole through lawsuits and attempted take-downs of infringing material<sup>275</sup>.

Initially a retaliatory Denial of Service attack was planned against Aiplex, under the title of 'Operation Payback'<sup>276</sup>, however the site had recently been attacked independently so the focus was switched to a much bigger target, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPIAA)<sup>277</sup>.

272 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*, 67.

273 Ben Grubb, "Film industry hires cyber hitmen to take down internet pirates," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, posted September 8, 2010, <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/film-industry-hires-cyber-hitmen-to-take-down-internet-pirates-20100907-14ypv.html>.

274 Ibid.

275 Ernesto Van der Sar, "Kanye West Declares War on The Pirate Bay," *Torrentfreak*, posted February 18, 2016, <https://torrentfreak.com/kanye-west-declares-war-on-the-pirate-bay-160218/>.

276 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*, 97.

277 "4chan DDOS Takes Down MPAA and Anti-Piracy Websites," *Torrentfreak*, posted September 18, 2010, <http://torrentfreak.com/4chan-ddos-takes-down-mpaa-and-anti-piracy-websites-100918/>.

Internet security software company Panda Labs observed that MPIAA.org was offline for 21 hours between September 18 and 19 2010<sup>278</sup>. The DDOS against the MPIAA was followed by a similar attack on the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) which suffered shorter website interruptions over the following day<sup>279</sup>. These were followed by an unsuccessful attack on the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) and a re-targeting of Aiplex on the September 20. Further attacks against the websites of pro-copyright lobbyists and law firms continued into October, during which the website of the Classification and Ratings Administration (CARA), copyprotected.com, was hacked and a message was uploaded to its main page which included the following statements:

...Over the past years, we have borne witness to a technological revolution. The individual has become free, in the most extreme anarchistic sense, to share ideas. Some of these ideas are shared behind proxies, darknets, or similar “closed doors”. Nevertheless, the ideas are out there. There have been similar instances of such revolutions of the mind. Their effects on society are inestimably great. As in past times with the invention of the printing press, so it is today that the people embrace this revolution, this new “anarchy” of freedom to share, while their autocratic rulers seek to crush this freedom....

Pirates are also numerous among the poor, as this demographic cannot afford things like college books or entertainment. Indeed, while often ignored by those interested only in bread and circuses, a vast amount of educational literature is available to the everyday pirate online. Piracy democratizes knowledge and makes education affordable.

...There was a time when powers that be attempted to silence the printing press, the blank cassette and the recordable CD. All of these previous attempts at censorship have failed, and future attempts of this nature are doomed to failure...

The man on the street already knows this...He knows that something is wrong when solicitors use copyright to blackmail thousands of people sharing information...

He knows that it is not right when his leaders inexplicably support massive capitalist enterprises over the majority opinion of their own people. He knows they are wrong when they use illegal means to get what they want, while hypocritically deprecating their opponents for doing the same...

Of course, these organizations carefully omit the fact that only a small percentage of the profits made by big media ever make it to those who actually produce it. Do they

278 Luis Corrons, “4chan Users Organize Surgical Strike Against MPAA,” *Panda Security*, posted September 17, 2010,

<http://pandalabs.pandasecurity.com/4chan-users-organize-ddos-against-mpaa/>.

279 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower*, *Spy*, 99.

ever disclose how small of a percentage most script writers, novelists, etc., actually make? Of course not, and there is a reason why. Do these anti-piracy organizations truthfully disclose how much they receive in donations, and from whom? Of course not, and there is a reason for this also.

In the end, our DDOS efforts have been compared to waiting for a train. What must the people do to be heard? To what lengths must they go to have their pleas taken seriously? Must they take to the streets with noose and handgun before those in power take notice?

You are forcing our hand by ignoring the voice of the people. In doing so, you bring the destruction of your iron grip of information ever closer. You have ignored the people, attacked the people and lied to the people. For this, you will be held accountable before the people, and you will be punished by them.

We will not stop.  
We will not forget.  
We will prevail.  
We are Anonymous<sup>280</sup>.

This statement criticises the main justifications of the copyright industries; that the threat posed by home recording and rewritable media to artist revenue make copyright mechanisms and legislation necessary. It also criticises the relationship between governments, business and lobbyist groups as well as highlighting the passive acceptance of copyright-infringing activities by the wider population as discussed in the previous chapter.

This statement is important as it illustrates how the Anonymous identity had changed since 2008 and the build-up to Project Chanology. This text is broader in scope and more serious in tone than the 'Message to Scientology'. Both use dramatic language and internet hyperbole as part of making political statements: terms such as 'you bring the destruction of your iron grip of information ever closer...For this, you will be held accountable before the people, and you will be punished by them.' An Anonymous-identifying interviewee affirmed this kind of maximal approach in an interview with Panda Labs:

Q: If you were able to resolve this situation, what would you want the respective media authorities of the world to do?

A: Personally, I would want them to basically go the fuck away altogether. Remove the barbaric laws they have lobbied for. Treat people like PEOPLE instead of criminals. Their long outdated traditional views on copyright infringement enforced

280 Luis Corrons, "4chan Users Organize Surgical Strike Against MPAA," *Panda Security*.

solely by rich and powerful corporations need to be modified in light of the modern age on the Internet, the Information Age<sup>281</sup>.

Operation Payback continued to snowball as it found new targets. At a convention panel in October 2010 Gene Simmons, bassist and front-man for the band K.I.S.S. stated 'Make sure there are no incursions. Be litigious. Sue everybody. Take their homes, their cars. Don't let anybody cross that line'<sup>282</sup>. Anonymous DDOS'd Simmons' website for over a day in response<sup>283</sup>. Operation Payback was sustained by attacks such as these, but as was the case with Project Chanology there were diminishing returns as the Operation progressed. Operation Payback was never going to destroy the media or copyright industries, especially by going after the ultimately superficial corporate websites of their respective targets. The claims made in the statement above are evidence of Anonymous' slide into pure 'morfaggotry', the 'Eternal September' brought about by Anonymous' increased attractiveness to a new audience of cause-orientated activists whose enthusiasm kept the identity of Anonymous going but diluted the previously-held internal values of trolling and ironisation which had been at the core of this identity since the beginning.

Anonymous' operations have always faced an additional opponent, one which not named in their videos or 'press releases'. This opponent was and remains the Sisyphean battle against the inevitable decay of enthusiasm that comes from running a political yet notionally criminal campaign online. Without physical geographic or social anchoring<sup>284</sup> there is little drawing the Anonymous constituency together except by maintaining sense of outrage towards a clear target. This entropy can only be combated through finding new targets or causes, creating new media exposure and using the outrage of the wider public to maintain internal levels of organisational momentum. This constant need for nemeses that can be identified as evil, against whom Anonymous can be contrasted as good only serves to reinforce the existence

281 "An Interview with Anonymous," *Panda Security*, posted September 29, 2010, <http://pandalabs.pandasecurity.com/an-interview-with-anonymous/>.

282 Matthew Lasar, "KISS frontman on P2P: "Sue everybody. Take their homes, their cars."," *Ars Technica*, posted October 6, 2010, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2010/10/kiss-frontman-we-should-have-sued-them-all/>.

283 John E. Dunn, "Gene Simmons battles Anonymous group after new DDOS attacks," *Network World*, posted October 21, 2010, <http://www.networkworld.com/article/2192435/lan-wan/gene-simmons-battles-anonymous-group-after-new-ddos-attacks.html>.

284 Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 59.

and necessity of said nemeses. Without targets such as The Church of Scientology or the MPIAA there would be no reason for an otherwise disconnected and anonymous community like Anonymous to cooperate in the way that Project Chanology and Operation Payback enabled.

Fortunately for Anonymous the momentum needed to maintain Operation Payback came from an auspicious combination of events. In December 2010 the whistle-blowing website Wikileaks came under political pressure over its publication of decades of diplomatic cables and other previously confidential documents. This pressure included the freezing of Wikileaks' financial assets and an alleged denial of service attack<sup>285</sup>. These circumstances were almost a repetition of those which led to the commencing of Operation Payback. The similarity between the two gave Operation Payback a new purpose and a new selection of targets which was different enough to stave off the inevitable decay in motivation but similar enough to not require a substantial change in rhetoric or political positioning. Operation Payback transformed into Operation Avenge Assange<sup>286</sup>, opening with retaliatory denial of service attacks against Paypal, Mastercard and Visa as well as the Swedish Prosecution Authority who were trying to extradite Julian Assange on sexual assault charges; charges that were criticised as politically-motivated method extradite Assange to the United States<sup>287</sup>.

Operation Avenge Assange was deployed in what was becoming a formulaic pattern<sup>288</sup>. Various declarations of intent predicted retaliatory attacks during December 2010. From December 6 to December 10 the public-facing websites of Paypal, Mastercard, Visa, PostFinance, MoneyBookers, and the Swedish Prosecution Authority were knocked offline by DDOS attacks. There was not much to differentiate Operation Avenge Assange from its predecessors in terms of operational processes and outcomes. Until this point Anonymous had suffered very few 'casualties' during their operations. A small number of Anons were arrested for their involvement in Project Chanology, however this was part of the Church of Scientology's process of attrition through litigation designed to deter opponents. If Operation

285 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*, 118.

286 "Operation; Payback broadens to "Operation Avenge Assange"," *Panda Security*, posted December 6, 2010, <http://pandalabs.pandasecurity.com/operationpayback-broadens-to-operation-avenge-assange/>.

287 Harriet Alexander, "Why is Julian Assange still inside the embassy of Ecuador?," *The Telegraph*, posted February 4, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/wikileaks/11681502/Why-is-Julian-Assange-still-inside-the-embassy-of-Ecuador.html>.

288 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy*, 122.



Avenge Assange was the 'shot heard around the world'<sup>289</sup>, then what happened afterwards clearly showed that there were plenty of people listening.

Anonymous had created a perfect storm through a concentrated burst of direct and indirect attacks on the entertainment industry, pro-copyright groups, governments and major global financial institutions in the space of a single year. Unlike Hal Turner's failed lawsuit in 2007 and Anonymous' other early victims, these organisations were able to retaliate more effectively than vague or misguided litigation. Before the end of 2010 the German police and security services, in collaboration with the FBI, were investigating several Anonymous IRC servers linked to the attacks on Paypal et al<sup>290</sup>. In January 2011 5 Anons were arrested in England, 4 were arrested in Holland and six months later 14 were arrested in America, the latter becoming known as the 'Paypal 14'. This group were convicted in December 2013; however they were either fined or faced much smaller sentences than the 10 years their crimes warranted<sup>291</sup>.

Part of the problem lay with Anonymous' weapon of choice. The majority of Anonymous' DDOS attacks throughout their history were carried out using a tool called the 'Low Orbit Ion Cannon' or LOIC. The LOIC is an open-source tool for stress-testing computer networks which simulates a large number of incoming requests for information. From Project Chanology onwards Anonymous used the LOIC to conduct denial of service attacks; each user inputs the IP address of the given target into the software, which floods this target with data requests. The end goal is either to slow the target server to unusable levels or crash it altogether. This is either done by individual users aiming the LOIC or by botnets; networks of linked computers controlled remotely. Unfortunately for those using it the LOIC turned out to be '...as safe as a torn condom'<sup>292</sup>. Tests carried out by the Design and Analysis of Communication Systems Group at the University of Twente on the LOIC program used in Operation Payback/Avenge Assange found that unless the user took precautions to hide their

289 Noam Cohen, "Web Attackers Find a Cause in Wikileaks," *The New York Times*, posted December 9, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/10/world/10wiki.html>.

290 Robert McMillan, "FBI raids ISP in Anonymous DDOS investigation," *Computerworld*, posted December 30, 2010, [http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9202838/FBI\\_raids\\_ISP\\_in\\_Anonymous\\_DdoS\\_investigation](http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9202838/FBI_raids_ISP_in_Anonymous_DdoS_investigation).

291 David Gilbert, "Paypal 14 'Freedom Fighters' Plead Guilty to Cyber-Attack," *International Business Times*, posted December 6, 2013, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/paypal-14-freedom-fighters-plead-guilty-cyber-528058>.

292 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*, 134.

own IP address it would be sent to the target, making it very easy to trace the perpetrators. The conclusion from these tests noted that 'The current attack technique can therefore be compared to overwhelming someone with letters, but putting your real home address at the back of the envelope'<sup>293</sup>. This meant that for all the apparent successes of Operation Payback/Avenge Assange; drawing attention to the hypocrisy of the entertainment industry and exposing the plight of Wikileaks, the perpetrators had left a clear trail of digital breadcrumbs for the authorities to follow. Up until this point Anonymous had maintained a fearsome reputation as an invincible collective of hacker bogeymen would harass their targets into jumping at their own shadows<sup>294</sup>. Anonymous' targeting of governments and multi-national corporations with Operation Payback/Avenge Assange changed the rules of engagement and raised the stakes.

The experience of using the LOIC highlighted the problem of small-scale and participatory DDOS attacks. With too little connection traffic to have a lasting effect and the potential evidence trail left by every user, more and more of Anonymous' DDOS operations would be carried out through the use of more 'conventional' botnets; large arrays of (normally virus-infected) computers and internet-enabled devices<sup>295</sup> whose collective traffic could be used to much greater effect and with much less individual risk. Anonymous had made limited use of smaller botnets during Project Chanology however the fallout from LOIC's vulnerabilities turned it into a major tool which would become a mainstay weapon for this period of their history<sup>296</sup>. This turn towards the use of pre-existing botnet infrastructure is indicative of where Anonymous was at this point in their history. Anonymous had expanded in scope and ambition, moving on from small scale inter-website rivalries and trolling to attack targets such as the Church of Scientology and the recording/entertainment industries; targets whose size and technical capability necessitated the use of bigger and more powerful tools such as

293 [Aiko Pras, Anna Sperotto, Giovane C. M. Moura](#), Idilio Drago, Rafael Barbosa, Ramin Sadre, Ricardo Schmidt and Rick Hofstede, "Attacks by "Anonymous" WikiLeaks Proponents not Anonymous," CTIT Technical Report 10.41, Design and Analysis of Communication Systems Group (DACS) University of Twente, posted December 10, 2010, <http://eprints.eemcs.utwente.nl/19151/01/2010-12-CTIT-TR.pdf>, 9.

294 Philips, "The House That Fox Built: Anonymous, Spectacle and Cycles of Amplification."

295 Sean Gallagher, "How one rent-a-botnet army of cameras and DVRs caused Internet chaos," *Arstechnica*, posted October 30, 2016, <https://arstechnica.co.uk/information-technology/2016/10/inside-the-machine-uprising-how-cameras-dvrs-took-down-parts-of-the-internet/>

296 Parmy Olson, *We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous and the Global Cyber Insurgency* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2013), 22.

botnets. Secondly this change is a noticeable shift away from Anonymous' punk/hacker DIY attitude which the LOIC embodied; taking a government-developed stress testing tool and turning it into a DDOS tool and propaganda weapon.

Commercially available Botnets exist only for criminal purposes<sup>297</sup> and their use lacks any of the humour or theatrical overtones of Anonymous' prior operations. It is important to reiterate that their use by any individual who identifies as Anonymous is not representative of everyone who attaches the same signifiers to themselves or to their particular causes and grievances, that their use is not indicative of the entire networked community taking a more hard-line stance, however their use in Anonymous' headline campaigns at this stage shows the willingness and capability to cross new legal, technical as well as philosophical boundaries. Whereas with the LOIC every user had to chose to add themselves to the collective attack; a form of mass distributed direct action where the audience is also the perpetrator, Botnets are largely automated and unfeeling, exploiting the poor hardware/software security and technical ignorance of others to achieve their own vanguardist ends.

This burst of attacks against targets which would have been inconceivable for a small internet community to orchestrate and execute 3 years previously was a clear point of divergence from relatively harmless trolling of previous attacks. At this point in Anonymous' history the lulz became thin on the ground; the tone of their press releases and the language used in statements such as the ones discussed in this chapter show this shift towards much higher levels of 'moralfaggotry' than in previous operations prior to 2008 and even in Project Chanology itself; surreal events like Operation Slickpubes and the humorous/cryptic signs bearing internet-speak slogans or pop-culture references waved outside Scientology premises in February 2008 were, by this point, thin on the ground. The Anonymous which was attacking governments and banks at the end of 2010 bore little resemblance to the trolls who harassed the Church of Scientology less than 3 years earlier. The effects of this change came to light over the next two years, providing both Anonymous' highest peak of activity and notoriety and a return to more lulz-oriented hacker-activism. This period also exposed Anonymous' weaknesses through a series of events whose ramifications for the Anonymous identity are still visible today.

297 Wytke van der Wagen, Wolter Pieters, From Cybercrime to Cyborg Crime: Botnets as Hybrid Criminal Actor-Networks, *British Journal of Criminology* 2015; 55 (3): 578-595.

## Conclusion

Between 2008 and 2010 an internet community who had otherwise been content with puerile harassment of other internet communities mobilised for a year-long and global protest movement, connecting thousands of people around the world with disparate interests and political positions through a central hub of beguiling imagery and enigmatic presentation. Anonymous' capricious and hydra-like approach to protesting through mixed vectors of DDOS attacks, physical protests and the back-and-forth of social media/public relations battles helped to forge their reputation as an aggressive if confusing political actor.

Anonymous found the ultimate nemesis in the Church of Scientology; a target open to attack as a significant source of lulz as well as a means to protest the more themes of online information censorship and social control at a period when such issues were beginning to enter the mainstream discourse. This combination of bizarre humour and serious political concerns made Anonymous' protests and online campaigns more visible and beguiling than previous efforts to publicly criticise the Church of Scientology. Project Chanology was the first time that Anonymous framed their own identity relative to their opponent; a flaw which would repeat itself throughout their history up to the present day and whose ramifications will be discussed in chapter 8.

Although it did not last forever Project Chanology was the start of Anonymous as an activist identity which we recognise today; the imagery and language which, as will be discussed in the next chapter, became a symbolic brand of protest applicable to any given cause. More importantly it spread the name and reputation of Anonymous by using the mechanisms of the media against itself to gain more notoriety and more headlines. By the end of 2010

Anonymous had maintained operational momentum through a series of operations which fed into each other; focussing on a target long enough to organise an attack but shifting focus to keep digital entropy at bay. However these campaigns had the fundamental flaw present in Anonymous since the beginning; tools such as denial of service attacks and the LOIC required sustained investment in the cause and the belief that one is not alone in conducting these clearly illegal actions. Much like a swarm of fish or an infantry formation facing a cavalry charge, those inside are only safe as long as everyone sticks together.

Project Chanology saw Anonymous adopt the Guy Fawkes mask both as a counter-surveillance tool and a common denominator of identity among an otherwise disconnected community. Throughout Project Chanology and Operation Payback/Avenge Assange this visual template expanded to draw from an array of pre-existing pop-culture narratives to deliver political messages through a medium those involved would be most likely to understand. This went a long way to cement Anonymous' visual language into an accessible template still in use today. The next chapter will explore the relationship between Anonymous and the Guy Fawkes mask and its historical relevance. This will be built upon through a wider examination of how Anonymous has appropriated and redirected popular culture, as well as how Anonymous have become a trope in film, television, art and video games since their political and cultural breakout in early 2008.

## Chapter Five – Anonymous and the Rewiring of Pop-Culture Imagery

Political organisations exhibit the social and structural characteristics of their formative environments. Despite developing almost entirely through the internet Anonymous is no different. The previous chapters in this research have established Anonymous' history as a product of the image-board website 4chan.org in the mid-2000s period, a time when the concept of 'internet culture' was developing in its own right. Allusions to Anonymous' use of pop-culture imagery have been made throughout this discussion; images such as the Guy Fawkes mask of the titular character from Alan Moore and David Lloyd's comic anti-hero in their graphic novel/film *V for Vendetta*<sup>298</sup>. The political sentiments of stories like *V for Vendetta* are concentrated into approachable and outwardly straightforward abbreviations of broader political and social issues. These politically dense images convey the maximum amount of information in an accessible and digestible format which, crucially, out-paces the otherwise lumbering and cumbersome conventional political discourse. This chapter will look in more detail at Anonymous' appropriation of such pop-culture imagery, including the wider historical context of Guy Fawkes as a symbol of capriciousness and rebellious behaviour.

This chapter will present a selection of stories and symbols in art, film and television which have been appropriated by Anonymous as short-cuts to deliver deeper political themes to a potentially uninitiated audience. Many of these materials cannot be directly connected to Anonymous through verifiable sources, however their similarity to Anonymous' visual language and their timing relative to Anonymous' development is too close to be mere coincidence. This chapter will consider Anonymous' use of symbols as currency and propaganda through Guy Debord's concept of the 'Society of the Spectacle' and Theodor Adorno's concept of the 'Culture Industry'; two complimentary critiques from the 1960s on the prevalence of consumer society and the mechanisms behind it; critiques which have appeared in much of Anonymous' materials throughout their history. In particular this chapter will relate Anonymous to the concept of appropriating and trivialising politically-charged symbols for commercial gain; a process Anonymous reversed through the re-appropriation of the Guy Fawkes mask as a marketable commodity and a political symbol.

Finally this chapter will question why looking at this aspect of Anonymous matters.

Anonymous remixes pop-culture artefacts and appropriates their political messages as

298 *V for Vendetta*, directed by James McTeigue (2006; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006), DVD.

political shorthand which is readable across the spectrum of political dispositions held by those identifying as Anonymous. This imagery has replaced the linguistic cues from 4chan such as triforming which served as badges of meta-identification in an environment in which one's identity is in flux.

### The imagery of Anonymous

4chan was one of the formative focal points of A-culture during the early 2000s; a breeding ground for linguistic and visual trends whose most palatable output echoed across the internet into the mainstream<sup>299</sup>. Despite an abundance of materials produced during this time, researching this period of Anonymous' history presents some challenges. The fragility of physical documents can be mitigated through conservation however information on the internet is fragile in a different way. Websites and files can vanish without trace and without warning, especially if it has not been deemed worthy of preserving for posterity<sup>300</sup>. As discussed in chapter 2 much of the content production on 4chan did not have long-term preservation in mind. This was the case with the unidentified 4chan user whose criticisms of the Church of Scientology kick-started Project Chanology and the creation of the Anonymous identity. Similarly it is entirely possible that in the future any of the websites cited in this research will have ceased to exist unless they have been archived by a third party. The earliest recorded materials relatable to Anonymous date from around 2005, a point in 4chan's history when the site was becoming more technologically and socially stable and the /b/ community was growing through the collective creation of an avatar to represent them and 4chan as a whole. This avatar was a green-skinned figure with a featureless face who wore a suit with a red tie. Sometimes this figure had a question mark where its face would be or the words 'no picture available'<sup>301</sup>:

299 Jamin Brophy-Warren, "Modest Web Site is Behind a Bevy of Memes," The Wall Street Journal, posted July 9, 2008,

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121564928060441097>.

300 Heather Brooke, *The Revolution Will Be Digitised* (United Kingdom: Windmill Books, 2012), 13.

301 "Anonymous: final boss of the internet?" *Romhack*, posted October 8, 2008,

<http://www.romhack.net/index.php?post/2008/10/03/Anonymous:-final-boss-of-the-Internet>.





This figure is known as 'old Anonymous'<sup>302</sup>, a character who represented /b/ and the 4chan population as a whole. During this period he featured in stylised conflict against a cat in a pink t-shirt which represented Christopher Poole, the moderating team or the more passive users of 4chan(warning, very loud music and flashing imagery)<sup>303304</sup>. The figure even appears in a video posted on YouTube on the eve of Project Chanology, in December 2007<sup>305</sup>. It is from this figure that the suited and masked persona which appears in Anonymous' symbolism originates, as well serving as an informal uniform guide for physical protests<sup>306</sup>:



302 "Green Anon / Old Anonymous," *Know Your Meme*, last modified May 16, 2015, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/green-anon-old-anonymous>.

303 "SageMan the game! O rly?," *Newgrounds*, posted Jan 21, 2006, <http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/290714>.

304 "Flash – Sage Man – 4chan," *4chan*, accessed May 12, 2016, <http://www.4chan.org/flash?file=SageMan.swf&title=Sage+Man>.

305 zand8888, "Mootroll'd," YouTube video, 0:41, posted December 6, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMJPMJ8cR14>.

306 Angus Griffin, "A History of the Anonymous Mask," *Dazed Digital*, posted June 14, 2013, <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/16360/1/a-history-of-the-anonymous-mask>.

It is unclear and may be impossible to ever determine exactly where the green-skinned ‘old Anonymous’ came from; the truth is lost to the rapid churn of 4chan’s short-lived content. The green skin may be a reference to the green 4chan logo<sup>307</sup> and he is almost identical to the central figure in Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte's 1964 painting *The Son of Man*<sup>308</sup>:



The similarities between the painting and ‘old Anonymous’ are obvious; the figure in the painting is wearing a suit with a red tie, with an apparently free-floating green apple obscuring his face. Magritte discussed the painting during a radio interview in 1965, mentioning ideas relevant to Anonymous such as the duality and tension of visibility and invisibility in our daily lives:

...you have the apparent face, the apple, hiding the visible but hidden, the face of the person. It's something that happens constantly. Everything we see hides another thing, we always want to see what is hidden by what we see. There is an interest in that which is hidden and which the visible does not show us. This interest can take the form of a quite intense feeling, a sort of conflict, one might say, between the visible that is hidden and the visible that is present<sup>309</sup>.

307 This may also explain the use of green backgrounds for many Anonymous flags and banners. When asked about the flag, many Anons do not know themselves why it is green, and it remains a topic of speculation.

308 “The Son of Man, 1946 by René Magritte,” *RenéMagritte*, accessed May 14, 2016, <http://www.renemagritte.org/the-son-of-man.jsp>.

309 Harry Torczyner, *René Magritte: Ideas and Images*, translated by Richard Millen (New York: Harry N. Abrams), 172.

The painting itself has been used in popular culture in a way which explores both Magritte's above statements and in a way which resonates with the common political attitude expressed by Anonymous' outward-facing materials. *The Son of Man* was a narrative device in the 1999 remake<sup>310</sup> of the 1968 film 'The Thomas Crown Affair'<sup>311</sup>. In the original 1968 version the titular character Thomas Crown is a millionaire who stages bank robberies to alleviate his boredom, 'for the lulz'. In the 1999 remake he instead steals paintings from supposedly secure museums. In the final sequence of the 1999 film Thomas Crown goes to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to return a stolen painting; dressed similarly to the figure in *The Son of Man* and under intense police surveillance. The police think they have the upper hand as he enters the museum but several identically-dressed accomplices appear from the crowd and start to move around the museum, crossing paths and switching briefcases to cover Crown's movements. When one of these accomplices is stopped by the police they discover his briefcase doesn't contain the stolen painting but is full of printed copies of 'The Son of Man'<sup>312</sup>. Crown escapes after setting off the fire alarm, the sprinklers washing a top layer of soluble paint off of another painting, which turns out to be the one he appeared to have stolen in the first place. The film's themes; Thomas Crown's outsmarting the police through hiding in plain sight, negating technological attempts to control his movement and the pluralistic layering of identity are similar to those Magritte explores in 'The Son of Man', both of which speak in turn to the artistic, capricious and technically-capable outwardly-projected Anonymous identity.

Today 'old Anonymous' is a rarity among Anonymous' visual language, it mostly appears as a nostalgic reference to 4chan's 'good old days' before Project Chanology and the Eternal September. This distinction between the green-faced 'old anon' and the Guy Fawkes-masked post-Chanology Anonymous has been made through images which convey this combination of nostalgia and cynicism<sup>313</sup>:

310 *The Thomas Crown Affair*, directed by John McTiernan (1999; Los Angeles, CA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2000), DVD.

311 *The Thomas Crown Affair*, directed by Norman Jewson (1968; Los Angeles, CA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2000), DVD.

312 Kangaroo, "The Thomas Crown Affair 1999 Final Heist," YouTube video, 6:59, posted April 8, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5OJmNmmhV4>.

313 "Anonymous then and now," *Funnyjunk*, posted August 20, 2010, [http://funnyjunk.com/funny\\_pictures/706606/Anonymous#ee9229\\_894219](http://funnyjunk.com/funny_pictures/706606/Anonymous#ee9229_894219).



As discussed in the previous chapter it was Project Chanology that drove Anonymous to adopt their most enduring symbol, the stylised Guy Fawkes mask worn by the enigmatic titular character ‘V’ from the film adaptation of the graphic novel *V for Vendetta*. Before discussing the themes of the story it is important to note that the intersection of the Guy Fawkes mask and Anonymous has a curious preface which is often missed when discussing their history. Two years before Project Chanology, a post on 4chan from March 2006 adapted one of V’s first speeches<sup>314</sup> by substituting the alliteration of words beginning with v to those beginning with b:

Bam! To behold, a public bulletin board, built of both brilliance and barbarity by bastards with boners. This bastion, no mere bulwark of boredom, is a brutal barrage of blistering bullshit, barely benevolent...But behind the bigotry and boobs, beyond the bitter broadcasts of bragging buffoons: here be the body politic. A brotherhood of blasphemy, blessed with more balls than brains, battling the bland, the bogus, the benign. Bedlam? Bring it on. But I babble...better to be brief. You may call me /b/<sup>315</sup>.

Towards the end of 2006 a stick-figure comic character called Epic Fail Guy appeared and began to circulate on 4chan<sup>316</sup>. His popularity came from the community concocting scenarios in which he is not successful with humorous results. Many of these scenarios were relative to the Zeitgeist of other images and cultural trends on 4chan and other websites at the time; however On September 30 2006 an Epic Fail Guy comic was posted which depicted him

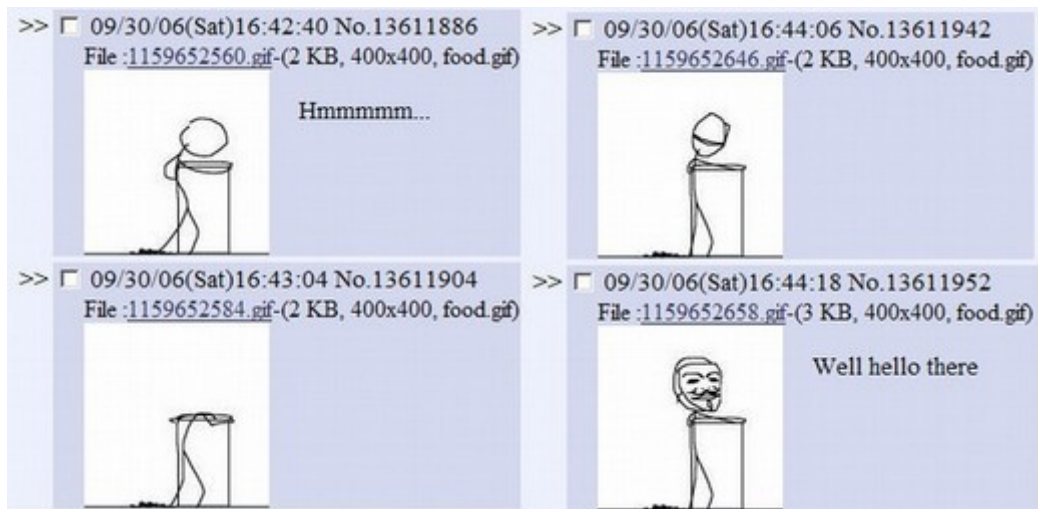
314 Dalonelybaptist, “V for Vendetta: V speech high definition,” YouTube video, 1:40, posted December 11, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQyqx1K495U>.

315 “V,” *Lurkmore*, accessed May 8, 2015, <http://www.lurkmore.com/wiki/V>.

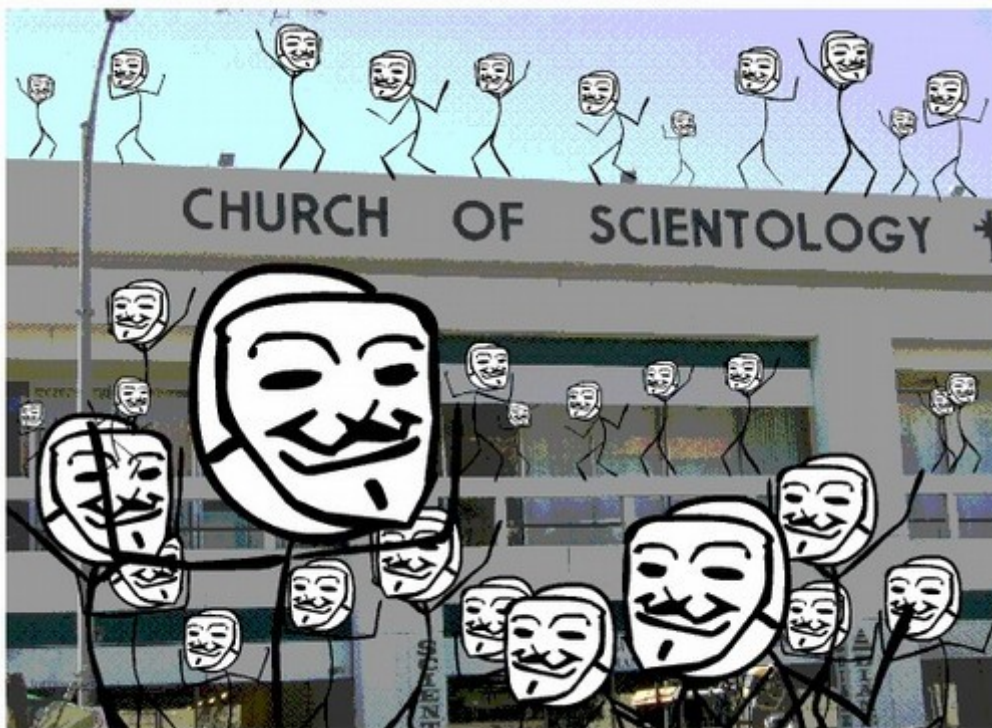
316 Kevin McDonald, “From Indymedia to Anonymous: Rethinking Action and Identity in Digital Cultures,” *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 8 (2015): 977.



finding a Guy Fawkes mask<sup>317</sup>.



We will never know the motivation of the artist or what point they were trying to make about Epic Fail Guy, 4chan or the internet as a whole, however it offers another interpretation of Anonymous' use of the Guy Fawkes mask; a desire to highlight how much of an 'epic fail' the Church of Scientology was<sup>318</sup>:



317 "Epic Fail Guy," *Know Your Meme*, last modified October 3, 2011, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/epic-fail-guy>.

318 "Project Chanology – Image #437,049," *Know Your Meme*, accessed June 5, 2016, <http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/437049-project-chanology>.

An important distinction can be drawn from these pre-Chanology materials and the original Message to Scientology video. Despite the Guy Fawkes mask's existence as a cultural artefact prior to its creation, the video features stock footage of a cloudy cityscape<sup>319</sup> and makes no allusion to the Guy Fawkes mask or V for Vendetta, visual hooks which have been frequently used since. This disparity shows that Anonymous is far from the unified hive mind their materials present to the public and their targets. However much this is an elaborate troll or simply many people applying their own ideas to what Anonymous means and is we will never know for certain. The Guy Fawkes mask is able to deliver a significant amount of condensed political meaning through its centuries of political and historical context. This chapter will now explore this historical context to help understand Anonymous' relationship to Guy Fawkes, the mask and what its use as a political identity can tell us about them.

#### Gunpowder, treason and plot; Anonymous and Guy Fawkes

The story of Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot is, at least in England a well-known one. In 1604 Guy (or his adopted Spanish name Guido) Fawkes and several others Catholic conspirators planned to detonate a large amount of gunpowder in the cellars of the Houses of Parliament, assassinating the Protestant king, James I, as well as the entire British government while they were in session for the opening of Parliament. This ceremony had been delayed from earlier in the year to November 5 due to the threat of the plague<sup>320</sup>. Fawkes was caught and tortured to reveal the names of his co-conspirators, who were all convicted of treason and publicly hung, drawn and quartered.

The British cultural memories of Guy Fawkes and the significance of November 5 have changed in the 400 years since the events of the Gunpowder Plot. November 5 was initially a Protestant celebration of the plot's failure, marked with sermons warning against the dangers of Catholicism and Popery. The first recorded cases of effigies being burned to mark the occasion were in 1625 as part of the collective negative reaction by the British public to Charles I marrying Henrietta Maria of France<sup>321</sup>. During the English Civil War theologian Charles Herle made accusations of papist tunnels "...from Oxford, Rome, Hell, to

319 Fruzsina Eördögh, "The Video That Made Anonymous," *Motherboard*, posted January 22, 2014, <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/the-video-that-made-anonymous>.

320 Antonia Fraser, *The Gunpowder Plot: Terror And Faith In 1605* (United Kingdom: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), 159-162.

321 James Sharpe, *Remember, Remember: A Cultural History of Guy Fawkes Day*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 89.

Westminster, and there to blow up, if possible, the better foundations of your houses, their liberties and privileges”<sup>322</sup>. On November 5 1670 occupants of coaches passing in or through London were robbed of alcohol for consumption or bonfires<sup>323</sup>. In the 1830s a secret society known as the 'Guildford Guys' conducted an annual campaign of stealing fences for firewood and attacking the homes of prominent officials opposed to the building of bonfires or the use of fireworks on November 5. The Guildford Guys were active for 30 years and were only stopped after the Metropolitan Police and the Army were mobilised to neutralise them in 1863<sup>324</sup>.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century November 5 celebrations had become largely apolitical, the emphasis placed on local social and charity events with stricter control of firework usage. This may have happened for two reasons. Firstly it may have been a marketing tactic by fireworks companies, turning the event into 'Fireworks Night' to boost sales. Secondly the de-clawing of the date and character of Guy Fawkes was a sign of a “...guilt complex, as though bonfire night can somehow still seriously be thought to fan the long-extinguished flames of anti-Catholic sentiment”<sup>325</sup>. As Alan Moore and David Lloyd were coming up with concepts for the comic series which would become *V for Vendetta* they drew upon this cultural memory of Guy Fawkes as inspiration. Alan Moore had considered doing a 1930s pulp comic strip; however illustrator David Lloyd was fed up researching and drawing 1930s-era props. Instead Moore placed the story in the near future with a uniquely British twist<sup>326</sup>. According to Moore the idea for using Guy Fawkes came from Lloyd:

...why don't we portray him as a resurrected Guy Fawkes, complete with one of those paper-mache masks, in a cape and conical hat? He'd look really bizarre and give Guy Fawkes the image he's deserved all these years. We shouldn't burn the chap every Nov. 5th but celebrate his attempt to blow up Parliament!<sup>327</sup>

This instantly appealed to Moore's political beliefs and proved the necessary creative spur, however they were confused by this apparently sudden trend of political sanitisation for a

322 David Cressy, "The Fifth of November Remembered", in Roy Porter, *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 74.

323 Ibid., 75.

324 Denis G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England*, (CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 246.

325 Martin Kettle, "The real festival of Britain," *The Guardian*, posted November 5, 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/nov/05/comment.martinkettle>.

326 *V For Vendetta*, Alan Moore article, p.269-271

327 Alan Moore and David Lloyd, *V For Vendetta* (United States of America: Vertigo, 2008), 272.



previously common historical figure. Alan Moore found himself confused by this process when developing the character:

...to me I was just using Guy Fawkes as a symbol, without really any references to the historical Guy Fawkes. It was the bonfire night Guy Fawkes I was referencing, with the at the time easily available Guy Fawkes masks. Although, weirdly, say we started doing V for Vendetta in 1980, something like that. Up until that point every November you'd be able to buy fireworks and you'd be able to buy Guy Fawkes masks in the shops. When we decided to use Guy Fawkes as the model for V for Vendetta, Dave Lloyd said, great I'll just go out around the shops and buy a Guy Fawkes masks to base it on. He came back and said to his astonishment, there weren't any Guy Fawkes masks to be had. And there have been none since....It's also no longer referred to as Guy Fawkes Night. It's like there's been a cultural shift and any references to somebody who wanted to blow up the houses of Parliament have been carefully clipped out<sup>328</sup>.

V for Vendetta was published between 1982 and 1985 in the British anthology comic 'Warrior'. Warrior was closed in 1985, before V for Vendetta was finished. DC Comics picked up V for Vendetta and reprinted the series to date in colour before publishing the rest. V for Vendetta is set in Britain but in an alternative historical time-line the then-future of 1999. In this alternative reality the Conservative Party lost the 1983 general election, the Labour government's nuclear disarmament policy kept Britain out of a nuclear war in the late 1980s, presumably between the United States and the Soviet Union. The economic downturn caused by the war facilitated the rise of the far-right 'Norsefire' party in the early 1990s. Soon after coming to power they arrested all ethnic minorities, homosexuals and left-leaning political opponents and put them in concentration camps, including the person who would become 'V'.

The majority of the story depicts V's terrorist campaign against the Norsefire government; assassinating politicians and public figures who worked at the camp he was held at before he escaped. He saves an ordinary woman, Evey Hammond, from the government's secret police, setting up a secondary plot/character arc. V fakes Evey's arrest and interrogation to make her experience the same things he did while incarcerated so that she truly understands his perspective and motivations. Eric Finch, the head of one of the branches of the secret police, deduces the location of V's secret base and confronts him, an act which V appears to have anticipated. Finch shoots V, whose last words are "...there's no flesh or blood within this cloak

328 "A for Alan Pt. 2: the further adventures of Alan Moore," *The Beat*, accessed July 3, 2016. [http://web.archive.org/web/20061103100559/http://www.comicon.com/thebeat/2006/03/a\\_for\\_alan\\_pt\\_2\\_the\\_further\\_ad.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20061103100559/http://www.comicon.com/thebeat/2006/03/a_for_alan_pt_2_the_further_ad.html).

to kill. There's only an idea. Ideas are bulletproof. Farewell.”<sup>329</sup> Evey decides not to unmask V, instead putting on a spare mask, cloak and hat herself. She places V's body on an underground train full of explosives and sends it to the disused Westminster underground station. The resulting explosion destroys Downing Street, the Norsefire government headquarters and the Houses of Parliament. The story ends ambiguously and abruptly; V's public speeches and actions have sparked a general uprising against the government, the few surviving characters leave London to face unknown fates.

The themes of V for Vendetta include revenge against those in power, the instigation of popular revolution and Alan Moore's own anarchist politics; all of which are wrapped around an enigmatic, theatrical and technologically capable yet crucially unidentified protagonist. However much Epic Fail Guy may have influenced the collective interpretation of what Anonymous was going to be, V for Vendetta's compelling narrative and unique visual cues had the potential to be used as a framework to deliver related political ideas to a wider audience. However it is not enough to just look at just the story of V for Vendetta to understand Anonymous.

#### The Spectacular Culture Industry and the political re-appropriation loop

There is an important distinction between V for Vendetta as a story and as a commercialised product of the entertainment industry. The graphic novel had been in print for decades prior to and during the creation of 4chan and the gradual politicisation of its population. It was V for Vendetta's transition from print to the cinema which brought its imagery and language to a wider audience and into modern popular culture. The business of marketing creates language and images to catch the attention of the viewer in order to promote a product or service. All the film posters, online adverts, trailers and other promotional materials sought to make the image of the Guy Fawkes mask and phrases such as 'England Prevails' and 'Strength Through Purity, Purity Through Faith' as visible as possible; all to generate interest and increase potential audience figures for the film's crucial opening weeks.

Although written in the 1960s, Theodor Adorno's critique of what he calls the 'Culture Industry' and Guy Debord's 'Society of the Spectacle' are useful framing device through which to interpret Anonymous' use of the Guy Fawkes Mask. For Adorno the mass production

329 Moore & Lloyd, V for Vendetta, 236.

of television, film and radio was a social anaesthetic; a means of controlling society and reinforcing power hierarchies. This is achieved through creating artificial needs which are fulfilled by products and services which only serve to perpetuate them instead<sup>330</sup>. According to Adorno the celebration of heroic rebels such as ‘V’ is a further layer of artificiality which only reaffirms this pacification structure. Under such a system rebels and heroes can be celebrated as long as the destabilising ideas they express and act upon are not thought about and acted upon in real life:

...it encourages admiration for the heroic individual and glorifies the values of candour, unselfishness and generosity. And yet from our earliest youth all of this is only admitted on the condition that it is not after all to be taken seriously<sup>331</sup>.

French Marxist thinker Guy Debord's ‘The Society of the Spectacle’ provides a complementary critique of commodity fetishism and the replacement of human and interaction with simulation; ideas equally relevant today in the context of ubiquitous social media. His discussion of the commercially-driven sanitising of rebellious ideas and imagery can be related to Adorno’s own critique as well as to Anonymous’ adoption of the Guy Fawkes mask:

A smug acceptance of what exists is likewise quite compatible with a purely spectacular rebelliousness, for the simple reason that dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity as soon as the economics of affluence finds a way of applying its production methods to this particular raw material<sup>332</sup>.

As a product of the Culture Industry, V for Vendetta was a product designed to recoup more money through cinema tickets, merchandise, and other deals for those who made and distributed it than it cost to make. It was not made to seriously promote violent rebellion against the state. The marketing for V for Vendetta the product promoted its politicised language and imagery as marketing; putting posters on the sides of buses, at train stations and on billboards everywhere. In this context such language and imagery can be displayed publicly without the authors being arrested as they are quarantined within the realm of fiction; it is not real and it is not to be taken seriously. The same goes for the wide array of merchandise ranging from posters and t-shirts to desk ornaments<sup>333</sup> as well as the replica Guy

330 Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, edited by J. M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge, 2001), 67.

331 Ibid, 61-62.

332 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 38.

333 “V for Vendetta Bobble Head,” *Entertainment Earth*, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.entertainmentearth.com/prodinfo.asp?number=FU2534>.

Fawkes masks themselves.

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the adoption of the mask may have been to indicate how much the Church of Scientology was an 'Epic Fail', however there was a practical aspect to the adoption of the imagery of Guy Fawkes. The Church of Scientology was notorious for litigating against and harassing its detractors. Fortunately for Anonymous, Warner Bros.' marketing efforts meant that a range of accurate and well-made replica Guy Fawkes masks available in film memorabilia and comic shops around the world. This gave the protesters access to a cheap counter-surveillance tool in the form of identical face-covering masks. As well as providing anonymity at protests, Anonymous' adoption of the Guy Fawkes mask has achieved something subtly remarkable. Anonymous took a politically-charged symbol of violent revolution, regicide and a cypher for Alan Moore's own anarchist politics which had been processed by the Culture Industry for themselves and turned it back into a politically-charged symbol of protest which could be made relevant to any cause. This conflict between the commercialisation of the Guy Fawkes mask as a political symbol and Anonymous politically reconstituting it is complicated by the nature of the masks themselves. As official film merchandise a portion of the money from every mask sold filtered into the pockets of Warner Bros., one of the largest media publishing companies in the world. This cognitive dissonance between using the mask as the face of a hacker-activist network while giving money to an international corporation with a long history of brute-force copyright enforcement tactics<sup>334</sup> was an embarrassing contradiction.

Anonymous emerged from an environment whose visual language and social conventions were based on appropriating popular culture for their own use. This approach was successfully applied to this particular problem of claiming to fight the film industry with one hand and lining its pockets with the other. The Project Chanology/ early Anonymous protesters wore the official masks, recognisable by their off-white colour and detailed shading. There are now several alternatives which range in sophistication and price. The most basic bootleg Guy Fawkes mask is simply a design for printing on a sheet of A4 paper. This design was used by members of the Polish Parliament to protest changes to copyright

334 Timothy B. Lee, "Warner Bros: we issued takedowns for files we never saw, didn't own copyright to," *ArsTechnica*, posted November 10, 2011, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2011/11/warner-admits-it-issues-takedowns-for-files-it-hasnt-looked-at/>.

legislation in 2012<sup>335</sup>:



The next step up from this is what appears to be a direct copy of an official mask. These look almost exactly the same as the official masks, distinguishable by their flat white colouring and less sophisticated painting. These masks are probably vacuum-formed<sup>336</sup> from an original mask and are freely available to buy online for much less than the official masks<sup>337</sup>. The differences between these and the official masks are visible in the picture below which was taken at a Million Mask March in central London in 2014<sup>338</sup>:

335 Parmy Olson, "Amid ACTA Outcry, Politicians Don Anonymous Guy Fawkes Masks," *Forbes*, posted January 27, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/parmyolson/2012/01/27/amid-acta-outcry-politicians-don-anonymous-guy-fawkes-masks/#16c2de35ad8a>.

336 A cheap process of reproduction perfect for copying the mask; whatever you want to copy is placed on a grill with an air suction pump underneath. A sheet of heated plastic is placed over the top and the pump sucks out all the air between the plastic sheet and the source object. The pressure pulls the sheet onto the object, making a hollow copy.

337 "SuperToney Guy Fawkes V for Vendetta Mask," *Amazon*, accessed May 19, 2016, <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B013W4TY5W?psc=1>

338 Ben Collins, "Anonymous Masks November 5<sup>th</sup>." 2014. JPEG file.



As well as re-politicising its merchandise Anonymous have also taken scenes from the film itself as source materials and framing devices for their own messaging. In a scene present in both the graphic novel and the film V takes over a government-controlled television station to deliver a speech chiding the population for their passivity in letting the Norsefire regime take over, but also to tell them there is hope, that things can be changed<sup>339</sup>. This scene has been used as a template for many of Anonymous' 'Message to [insert target here]' videos<sup>340</sup>. These videos follow a similar pattern, beginning with dramatic and possibly deliberately over-produced intro sequences<sup>341</sup> of a spinning green globe which transforms into the secondary major symbol of Anonymous; a UN-style logo of a suited figure with a question mark for a head against a stylised globe and laurels background<sup>342</sup>:

339 Welcome to 3ForceS Channel!, "V is for Vendetta TV Speech," YouTube video, 3:15, posted January 1, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DRAD-j8ObI>.

340 Anonymous Third, "Anonymous message to the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina (February 2016)," YouTube video, 1:56, posted February 25, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-HOT9yHD-A>.

341 TheEatKing, "Intro Anonymous 2012 (HD)," YouTube video, 0:17, posted March 8, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qHWl001rvE>.

342 Erick M. Rodriguez, "Intro Anonymous HD 1080p + Download Link," YouTube video, 0:17, posted January 22, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYXNmXByzOU>





The main part of video, referencing the above scene from the film, typically showing a hooded and masked figure gesticulating while reading from a piece of paper<sup>343</sup>:



The beauty of this video is in its adaptability. The reader is wearing a mask so any audio can be played over the top of it for any operation and in any language. This type of video created by Anonymous uses the visual framing of television news channels<sup>344</sup> which enables him to speak to the population through a medium of representation they are familiar with, will listen to and are likely to understand<sup>345</sup>.

343 AnonZmAs, "Video para hacer video de Anonymous – Remasterizado a 1080p," YouTube video, 4:34, posted July 29, 2014,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akD542\\_ZbgM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akD542_ZbgM).

344 Bintro, "News intros compilation Europe 2014," YouTube video, 6:28, posted August 13, 2014,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jwuK39OA84>.

345 Lewis Call, "A is for Anarchy, V is for Vendetta: Images of Guy Fawkes and the Creation of Postmodern Anarchism," *Anarchist Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 167.



In the closing scenes of *V for Vendetta* a masked crowd marches on Parliament and Downing Street on November 5, dressed in V's mask, robes and hat. It is a visually striking scene which has become part of Anonymous' visual language and political practices. It has been made manifest in the 'Million Mask March' protests held around the world every year on November 5; a strange combination of political protest and pop-culture re-enactment<sup>346347</sup>:



346 BTGKarlo, "V for Vendetta – final revolution scene," YouTube video, 4:51, posted January 29, 2011, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_gHVG0oE48](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gHVG0oE48).

347 Steve Hopkins, "Million Mask March 2015 London Route Map: How To Avoid Tonight's Protest On Your Evening Commute," *The Huffington Post*, last modified November 5, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/11/05/million-mask-march-route-\\_n\\_8477300.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/11/05/million-mask-march-route-_n_8477300.html).

During the protests, several Anons expressed similar sentiments; that this adoption of a pop-culture artefact was a framework for political expression and protest:

Anonymous ‘Voice 001’: Do you know V for Vendetta movie? There you go, that’s the context. Do you know what he said? That governments should be afraid of their people not people afraid of their government, that’s the point.<sup>348</sup>

Anonymous ‘Voice 002’:...a lot of people have seen the V for Vendetta film but don’t realise that Anonymous is, well I believe, its apart from that. Its not just about the film, but obviously the film’s quite powerful in the sense that it does capture what is happening now to civil liberties, freedom, freedom of the internet, information and even the fact that covering your face at a protest can land you in prison...<sup>349</sup>

Anonymous did not develop in a vacuum, nor did they only adopt the stories and themes of V for Vendetta. The classic narrative framework of an exceptional person taking a stand against their enemies has been present in storytelling for thousands of years; visible in ancient poetry and stories such as Beowulf and the Epic of Gilgamesh. In the context of Anonymous’ development we can see stories which address the complications of human interaction with computers, the internet and artificial intelligence as source materials; their images and ideas made into political shorthand which can instantly deliver volumes of condensed yet accessible meaning to as wide an audience as possible.

The first and perhaps clearest analogous case is the 1999 film *The Matrix*<sup>350</sup>. In *The Matrix* a hacker, known as ‘Neo’ discovers that our contemporary 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century reality is actually a massive computer simulation run by sentient machines in a nightmarish future, the titular ‘Matrix’. The human race is kept in stasis to harness our bio-electrical energy and the Matrix is a shared virtual prison to keep humanity mentally subdued:

Morpheus:...You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Neo: The Matrix.

Morpheus: Do you want to know what it is?

Neo: Yes.

Morpheus: The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television.

348 Anonymous “Voice 001”, Ben Collins, 2012.

349 Anonymous “Voice 002”, Ben Collins, 2012.

350 *The Matrix*, directed by The Wachowski Brothers, 1999.

You can feel it when you go to work... when you go to church... when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

Neo: What truth?

Morpheus: That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Into a prison that you cannot taste or see or touch. A prison for your mind<sup>351</sup>.

Neo is unplugged from the Matrix by a group of resistance fighters who want to save the human race from intangible and perpetual slavery by destroying the Matrix and the machines who run it. They hack into the Matrix to find its weaknesses and to find others who may be able to help them. They train their minds in advanced combat, enhanced reflexes and give themselves an arsenal of weapons while inside the Matrix to fight the Agents, the Matrix's anti-virus programs. Eventually Neo discovers he is 'The One'; a messianic figure destined to destroy the Matrix and save the human race from slavery once and for all. The Matrix's beguiling combination of stylised aesthetics and representation of super-powered hackers make it an attractive cipher for political statements relating to government control of society and our relationship to technologies such as the internet. The machines and Agents represent governments and structures of information control, while Neo and the other hackers represent an ultimate power fantasy for the new generations of digital natives including Anonymous; digital super-humans able to attack and outmanoeuvre the authorities, exposing the hidden truths of the world.

Imagery from the Japanese manga/animé franchise *Ghost in the Shell* has also been used by Anonymous. The films and television series of *Ghost in the Shell* are set in mid-21st century Japan. Cybernetic enhancements, artificial intelligence and constant internet connectivity have become commonplace. Most of the stories centre around a counter cyber-terrorism and anti-corruption police unit called Section 9. One of the major antagonists in the first television series, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*<sup>352</sup> is a skilled hacker called The Laughing Man<sup>353</sup>. Due to the ubiquity of cybernetically enhanced or replaced eyes among the population he is able to hide in plain sight; hacking the vision of anyone who sees him. He can make himself either completely invisible or replaces his face in the eyes of those who see him with a distinctive blue and white logo circled with text from The Laughing Man, a short story by

351 "The Matrix Quotes," *IMDb*, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0133093/quotes>.

352 *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, directed by Kenji Kamiyama, 2002

353 "Laughing Man," *Ghost in the Shell Wiki*, last modified November 16, 2015, [http://ghostintheshell.wikia.com/wiki/Laughing\\_Man](http://ghostintheshell.wikia.com/wiki/Laughing_Man).

J.D. Salinger<sup>354</sup>:



In the Stand Alone Complex series The Laughing Man's first attack is against the CEO of a company he discovered had tried to patent a cure for 'Cyber-brain Sclerosis' and had developed nano-machines that were insufficient for such a process<sup>355</sup>. Over time Section 9 discover that the image of the Laughing Man was used by a secret part of the Japanese government to conduct attacks against domestic targets, 'false flag' operations, to deflect attention away from its own negligent or morally dubious activities. The publicity around the Laughing Man's attacks inspired a string of copycat attacks by individuals who all claimed that they were the 'real' Laughing Man. Section 9 discover that the Laughing Man they were seeking only launched his attacks after coming across documents online exposing widespread corporate corruption. Therefore whoever shared those documents in the first place may be the 'real' Laughing Man, or they may have acquired that information elsewhere in turn.

There are many elements of this story and the Laughing Man character which are relevant to Anonymous. The Laughing Man is a shared identity used by individuals intent on exposing corporate wrongdoing who are also skilled hackers able to operate above and beyond the

354 J. D. Salinger. *Nine Stories* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1970).

355 "Corporations," *Serena Dawn Spaceport*, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://www.serenadawn.com/GITS-Corporations.htm>.



technical abilities of their targets. The Laughing Man hides in plain sight under a smiling façade which the rich and powerful (i.e. those who can afford enhanced ocular implants which were vulnerable to The Laughing Man) could not see through. Although the Laughing Man is not a common sight among the imagery used by Western Anonymous', there is at least one example of it being used during the 2014 'Million Mask March' in Japan; two Japanese Anons were seen wearing both the Guy Fawkes mask and carrying self-made Anonymous ID cards displaying combinations of Anonymous logos and The Laughing Man imagery<sup>356</sup>:



The 1995 film *Hackers*<sup>357</sup> is about a group of teenagers who accidentally hack their way into a corporate conspiracy, outwitting both multinational corporation trying to stop them leaking embarrassing data and the police who are trying to arrest them. Throughout the film there are references to the 'Hacker Manifesto', a document written by hacker Loyd Blankenship shortly after his arrest in 1986:

[Reading from "The Hackers' Manifesto."]

Agent Bob: "This is our world now. The world of the electron and the switch; the beauty of the baud. We exist without nationality, skin color, or religious bias. You wage wars, murder, cheat, lie to us and try to make us believe it's for our own good, yet we're the criminals. Yes, I am a criminal. My crime is that of curiosity. I am a hacker, and this is my manifesto." Huh? Right? Manifesto? "You may stop me, but you can't stop us all."<sup>358</sup>

356 Anonymous (@Anonymypress), Twitter post, November 5, 2014, 7:18pm., <https://twitter.com/anonymypress/status/530076638063886336>.

357 *Hackers*, directed by Iain Softley (1995; CA:United Artists, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2000), DVD.

358 "Hackers Quotes," *IMDb*, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0113243/quotes>.

During the film one of the secondary protagonists states a close approximation to Anonymous' own language:

You could sit at home, and do like absolutely nothing, and your name goes through like 17 computers a day. 1984? Yeah right, man. That's a typo. Orwell is here now. He's livin' large. We have no names, man. No names. We are nameless!"<sup>359</sup>

The stories in these films and television series typically revolve around technologically-gifted individuals operating on the fringes of or completely outside 'the system', whether these be legal frameworks to punish those who use computers to commit crimes or a false reality created to distract the human race while we are used as batteries by sentient machines. Through their hacking skills and plurality of identity, as well as their physical and digital mobility they expose the hidden truths of the world which those in power want to keep secret through deception or pacification. Anonymous takes these pop-culture artefacts and re-frames them as condensed political discourse relative to whatever cause is being championed at the time. Anonymous have hijacked The Culture Industry's power to efficiently commodify and promote such artefacts around the world for commercial gain. Anonymous' constituency of pop culture-savvy digital natives are likely to be familiar with the narratives of the films and series mentioned herein. As with the Guy Fawkes mask, the imagery and catchphrases from these sources are loaded with political context and meaning which can be triggered in the minds of those viewing Anonymous' operation videos and other materials.

The adoption such imagery by Anonymous re-politicises images and messages of rebellion and revolution which have been diluted for commercial gain by using its weight and voracity of the Culture Industry against itself. Prior to the promotion of the film adaptation *V for Vendetta* had been another curio of Alan Moore's own eccentricity and political attitude, afterwards its slogans and imagery were known all over the world., despite its clear anti-authoritarian message *V for Vendetta* was even shown on television in China<sup>360</sup>. However, this process is far from one-sided. Anonymous was created in a media-rich environment of commercialised popular culture. It has taken nearly a decade but now Anonymous and the ideas behind it have been appropriated in turn.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> "China anti-censorship hopes rise after state TV airs *V for Vendetta*," *The Guardian*, posted December 20, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/20/china-anti-censorship-hopes>.

### The counter-appropriation of Anonymous

The 2012 horror film *Smiley*<sup>361</sup> is about a group of teenagers who discover an urban/internet legend on 4chan that typing the phrase 'I did it for the lulz' three times in a hidden online chat room will summon a man whose face has been mutilated into the shape of a smiley-face emoticon to kill you. The protagonist Ashley sees her friends and random strangers killed by 'Smiley' however they all reappear alive, revealing they were part of Anonymous and created 'Smiley' as a hoax. At the end of the film the real Smiley kills one of Ashley's friends while they are chatting online. The film's director Michael Gallagher received death threats for portraying 4chan and Anonymous in a negative light<sup>362</sup>.

Since 2008 the Anonymous identity has been attached to a widening spectrum of political causes, making headlines around the world at the same time as the ongoing wars in the Middle East were losing their novelty as news-worthy topics. Popular culture is a delayed barometer of events and topics relevant to the strata of society who readily engages with and consumes popular culture; from books and films to video games. Anonymous' relationship with the latter is particularly interesting and is one which has yet to be discussed sufficiently. The Call of Duty series is one of the biggest video game franchises in the world. The first three entries in the series were set during the Second World War but in 2007 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare<sup>363</sup> rebooted the series. Set in the present day CoD4 and its sequels are an example of this delayed reaction to world events in action; their stories depicting terrorism, nuclear proliferation, real or analogous conflicts in the Middle East as well as the increased use of Private Military Contractors (PMCs) as front-line troops.

By 2012 the series caught up to this downturn of wider interest in these themes and was belatedly responding to the rise of hackers as the new 'bad guys'. Call of Duty: Black Ops II<sup>364</sup> is set in the near future and features a drug lord/hacker called Raul Menendez as the main antagonist. Menendez hacks into the Chinese stock exchange, in retaliation the Chinese government stops exporting Rare Earth Elements to the West<sup>365</sup>, starting a new Cold War. In

361 *Smiley*, directed by Michael Gallagher (2012; Fever Productions LLC & MIJ Productions: Signature Entertainment, 2013), DVD.

362 Gerry Smith, "Michael Gallagher Says 4Chan Sent Death Threats About Horror Flick," *The Huffington Post*, posted October 9, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/08/4chan-michael-gallagher-death-threats\\_n\\_1949749.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/08/4chan-michael-gallagher-death-threats_n_1949749.html).

363 *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, directed by Jason West, Activision, Infinity Ward, 2007.

364 *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*, directed by Dave Anthony, Activision, Treyarch, 2012.

365 Chemicals and minerals used in almost all electrical goods, from phones to computers.



the game's futuristic setting the US Army has replaced most of its tanks and planes with unmanned/automated drone equivalents. Menendez allows himself to be captured so he can hack into their central control systems to turn them against the United States as revenge for the death of his family at the hands of the CIA.

This kind of robotic doomsday scenario has been written by science fiction authors since the 1950s, however Call of Duty: Black Ops II was one of the first mainstream video games with a hacker as the principal antagonist. The game's advertising campaign included videos discussing the potential weaknesses of over-relying on networked systems to wage war, one of which included a direct reference to Anonymous. One of the promotional videos featured former United States National Security Council member Oliver North<sup>366</sup> describing a future nightmare scenario where “The enemy could be anywhere, and it could be anyone”. A few frames of figure wearing a Guy Fawkes mask and holding a piece of paper are shown on screen and Oliver North continues by saying 'I don't worry about the guy who wants to hijack a plane, I worry about the guy who wants to hijack all the planes'<sup>367</sup>. These frames of a masked figure are taken directly from the generic Anonymous video template which in turn borrows from V for Vendetta, as discussed in this chapter. The first picture is from this template<sup>368</sup> and the second is from the trailer for Call of Duty: Black Ops 2<sup>369</sup>:

366 Most famous for his role in the Iran-Contra affair in the late 1980s; money from illegal arms sales to Iran was used to support the Nicaraguan anti-Communist ‘Contra’ rebels.

367 “Call of Duty, “Documentary – Official Call of Duty Black Ops 2,” YouTube video, 2:02, posted May 2, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm5PZGb3OyQ>.

368 AnonZmAs, “Video para hacer video de Anonymous – Remasterizado a 1080p,” YouTube video, 4:34, posted July 29, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akD542\\_ZbgM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akD542_ZbgM).

369 Darlene Storm, “Anonymous as cyber-terrorists hacking drones for targeted killings in Black Ops 2?,” *ComputerWorld*, posted May 2, 2012, <http://www.computerworld.com/article/2473250/cybercrime-hacking/anonymous-as-cyber-terrorists-hacking-drones-for-targeted-killings-in-black-ops-2.html>.

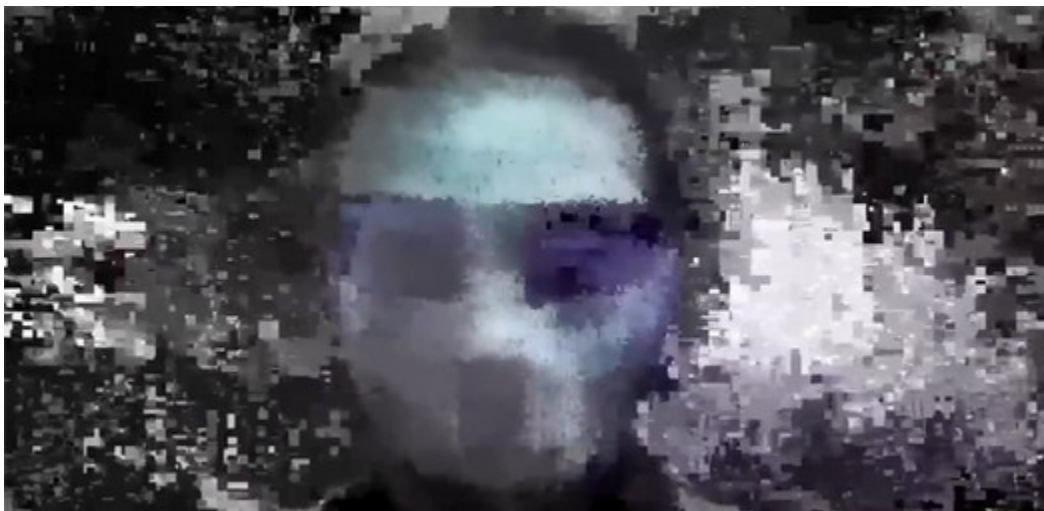


This act did not catalyse Anonymous to react in as robust a manner as one might expect. The personal details of the CEO of Call of Duty's publishing company Activision, Eric Hirshberg, were posted online<sup>370</sup> and video was uploaded to YouTube claiming:

370 Emil Protalinski, "Anonymous: 'We are not terrorists' (video)," *ZDNet*, posted May 8, 2012, <http://www.zdnet.com/blog/security/anonymous-we-are-not-terrorists-video/12002>.

'We are not terrorists, we are fighters for freedom in every aspect of meaning. However, if you want to present us in that way we will need to take action against your company and online servers. We will hijack military system and use valid data to control over the parameter[sic]'<sup>371</sup>.

Call of Duty is not the only video game franchise to draw inspiration from Anonymous. The *Watch\_Dogs*<sup>372</sup> games are set in a near-future America in which centralised network known as ctOS runs almost every aspect of daily life, from traffic lights and CCTV to internet access and the police. The protagonist of the first game Aiden Pearce is a hacker whose daughter died during a failed assassination attempt against him. He seeks revenge through hacking into ctOS and manipulating its interconnected systems to find those responsible. *Watch\_Dogs* features a hacker activist group called DedSec who the game's developers have stated are a direct analogue of Anonymous<sup>373</sup>. DedSec is a reference to the LulzSec group who will be discussed in the next chapter, as well as a modification of the computer protocol SECDED (single-error correcting and double-error detecting) which detects and fixes errors in the memory of a computer. Aiden Pearce doesn't work directly with DedSec however they have similar objectives; opposing the further expansion of ctOS by attacking those who run it and exposing its inner workings to the public. A promotional video for the game is presented as a ctOS broadcast that has been hacked by DedSec, replacing the corporate public service announcement footage with a masked figure proclaiming:



371 ALEXIUS ANON, "Anonymous threat to Activision BlackOps 2," YouTube video, 2:26, posted May 4, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ti3K0vbMCNc>.

372 *Watch\_Dogs*, directed by Jonathan Morin, Ubisoft, Ubisoft Montreal, 2014.

373 Eurogamer, "Watch Dogs: Dedsec vs Blume – Eurogamer Exclusive Interview," YouTube video, 8:50, posted March 26, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wOdGYQsisk>.

Citizens of Chicago, we are Dedsec. You have heard enough lies, it is time to hear the truth. You can be hacked. Someone is inside the network. We have seen him. He is not Dedsec, and we do not defend him. He is proof that the ctOS network is flawed and you are vulnerable. One man has done exactly what we have warned you about. Now is the time to wake up.<sup>374</sup>

Scattered around the explorable city the game takes place in are audio files the player can find on discarded phones and on hidden computers. Among them are further statements from the voice of DedSec including:

Did you vote this year? If the answer is 'no', change that answer to 'yes', because a vote and a non-vote are exactly the same. Every one of you voted for the same candidate because they all work for the same system. That system has not changed in the past fifty years.

Why do WE hide behind our masks? Why do they hide behind their masks? Drop their corporate lawyers and government connections and we'll drop our hoods. They point at DedSec, label us the bogeyman while they root through your closet.

How long to cripple this entire 'safe' city? It would take us a mere thirty seconds. Now imagine if we were to rise up as civilians, to challenge the powers that be. How long would it take them to shut us down when they control the power switch? Your tax dollars have paid for your own muzzle and cage<sup>375</sup>.

These snippets of political monologue express concerns relating to intrusive surveillance, control and exploitation of natural resources, overtures of revolution and questioning of identity concealment; analogues of the spectrum of issues Anonymous have collectively expressed throughout their history. At the time of writing *Watch\_Dogs 2*<sup>376</sup> has yet to be released, however what is known about it takes this concept much further. In *Watch\_Dogs 2* the protagonist is a hacker who is explicitly involved with DedSec and who has been framed by ctOS for a crime he didn't commit<sup>377</sup>.

374 Watch Dogs, "Watch\_Dogs – DedSec Trailer," YouTube video, 2:02, posted August 20, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NeRuOtXLHv4>.

375 SmileTheAussieGamer, "Watch Dogs QR Code Audio Logs: DedSec," YouTube video, 6:38, posted May 28, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wSd3i93J6o>.

376 *Watch\_Dogs 2* (2016), Ubisoft, Ubisoft Montreal

377 Rishi Alwani, "Injustice 2 and Watch Dogs 2 Price Confirmed for India," *Gadgets360*, posted June 9, 2016, <http://gadgets.ndtv.com/games/news/injustice-2-and-watch-dogs-2-price-confirmed-for-india-847162>.





In *Watch\_Dogs 2* DedSec are Anonymous passed through the filtering processes of the Culture Industry; the end result being a power fantasy for digital natives that replaces the muscle-bound action heroes from video games in the 1990s or the gruff no-nonsense soldiers as seen in *Call of Duty*. Their anarchist and rebellious sentiments contained in a wrapper that makes the expression of such statements permissible through their quarantine in a work of science fiction. The player character is an acrobatic hacker genius with access to an arsenal of wheeled/flying drones and 3D-printed guns to attack a newer and larger ctOS system. For games like *Watch\_Dogs 2* the decision to focus on exploring DedSec as an extreme version of Anonymous and as the main protagonists would have been taken very early in the development process. These kinds of design decisions need to be weighed up against sales and marketing possibilities and to ensure the end product appeals to the average game-buying demographic which is getting older every year<sup>378</sup>. Therefore the fact that an Anonymous analogue group were included in such an expensive and time-consuming process as making a mainstream video game in the first place highlights their status as an important element of modern culture. Despite the explicit appropriation of Anonymous for the political context and detail for *Watch\_Dogs*<sup>379</sup> the developers have not been threatened for doing so; there have

378 Jack Wallington, "10 UK Video Game Audience Stats," *Internet Advertising Bureau UK*, posted September 26, 2011,

<http://www.iabuk.net/blog/10-uk-video-game-audience-stats>.

379 Tim Jordan and Paul A. Taylor, *Hacktivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a cause?* (London: Routledge,

been no planned operations, leaks of personal information or YouTube videos calling for their destruction or eradication from the internet. The reverse of this is that DedSec have not been appropriated by Anonymous either.

Finally, as much as Anonymous have drawn inspiration from and in turn been depicted in modern forms of popular culture there are examples of artists in ‘traditional’ cultural mediums taking inspiration from Anonymous to create politicised works and cultural commentaries of their own. One of the most elaborate examples of this ‘Shell Game’, a series of paintings by political artist Molly Crabapple depicting the political and financial turmoil of 2011 as anthropomorphised female figures. One of the paintings called ‘The Hivemind’ depicts Anonymous as a green smiling woman made up of cables and holding a Guy Fawkes mask while a swarm of bees with small Guy Fawkes masks on their backs operate computers all around her<sup>380</sup>:

2004), 83.

380 Tim Maly, “Shell Game Illustrates Occupy and the Revolutions of 2011,” *Wired*, posted April 3, 2013, <http://www.wired.com/2013/04/molly-crabapple-shell-game/>.







The details in this painting throw light on the Anonymous of 2011 in a prescient manner. Molly Crabapple uses animal symbolism to critically extrapolate real-world situations<sup>381</sup>; for example in another painting on the monetisation of healthcare a queue of mice are led past a large vacuum device which sucks away all their money before they are crammed into prison-like hospitals, all of this overseen by grinning cats wearing suits and monocles as a satirical use of the ‘fat cat’ analogy. In addition to the cats desperately looking into the series of tubes<sup>382</sup> to find the Anonymous bees there are two cats wearing bee costumes with nervous expressions; an allusion to the possibility of government infiltration of Anonymous which, as will be discussed in the next chapter, would turn out to be an accurate prediction. In an interview with *The American Reader* prior to the Shell Game paintings going on display Molly discusses the interplay between art and political action, how the two can justify each other in a way which is relevant to Anonymous’ approach to symbolic visual politics:

When you make art about real events, a participant can look at it later. Maybe what they did ended disastrously. Maybe all the people they worked with now hate each other. Maybe the whole thing blew up in their face. But here’s a representation of their project. The representation is beautiful. And the representation, as much as their action, may inspire someone to take up the cause again. And then that person says, “Oh – maybe what I did was worth it.”<sup>383</sup>

381 Esther Zuckerman, “Molly Crabapple on ‘Shell Game’, Her Surreal Take On the Financial Crisis,” *The Village Voice*, posted March 11, 2012, <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/molly-crabapple-on-shell-game-her-surreal-take-on-the-financial-crisis-6717355>.

382 “Series of Tubes,” *Know Your Meme*, last modified June 20, 2013, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/series-of-tubes>.

383 Uzoamaka Maduka, “Interview with Artist Molly Crabapple,” *The American Reader*, accessed May 23, 2016, <http://theamericanreader.com/interview-with-artist-molly-crabapple/>.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the connection between Anonymous and their relationship with and use of the Culture Industry/Society of the Spectacle, how commercialised pop-culture imagery has been subverted and re-purposed into a form of political language appropriate for their audience and for Anonymous themselves. This has included how both of these constructs have pushed back, re-appropriating Anonymous as a cultural artefact in return. Why does any of this discussion of Guy Fawkes and representations of hackers in films and video games matter? The cultural traits which underpin Anonymous' socio-political frameworks developed in an environment where absorbing and reconstituting the output of the Culture Industry was an accepted if not necessary convention, enabling one to establish oneself as part of an otherwise nebulous community.

As Anonymous developed so did their use of popular culture as a shared identity. Over time this process became the weaponisation of watered-down political ideas which had been previously reduced to marketing buzzwords and profitable merchandise. Anonymous has redefined the appearance and use of the Guy Fawkes mask; changing both the layers of condensed meaning and its wider historical context and our relationship with the mask itself as a physical item. For Anonymous popular culture is an accessible set of common denominators. These visually appealing symbols and familiar narratives have been turned into an inclusive mechanism for politicising otherwise disenfranchised and apathetic generations of younger people who have already experienced a lack of meaningful interaction with existing political processes.

It no longer matters that the motivation for the Gunpowder Plot conspirators was returning England to Catholicism rather than to turn the country into a republic; the tensions between the monarch and the government that would lead to the English Civil War were almost half a century away. What matters is how Alan Moore's stylised Guy Fawkes mask is understood today as the face of Anonymous. Anonymous unintentionally subverted the marketing and commercial power of the Culture Industry's infrastructure, letting it do the 'heavy lifting' for them by promoting films, television series and video games to audiences all over the world. The sanitised ideas of altruistic individualism and overthrowing oppressive regimes they contain are open to being de constructed through Anonymous, undoing '...admiration for the

heroic individual and...the values of candour, unselfishness and generosity...[which] is only admitted on the condition that it not after all be taken seriously<sup>384</sup>.

Through a parasitic co-option of popular culture Anonymous produces propaganda materials that deliver concentrated meaning through an interplay of imagery and narratives their constituent audience is more likely to engage with than lengthier political debates or theory. Certainly in Britain the latent cultural memory of Guy Fawkes has survived across the centuries since his death; to this day part of annual State Opening of Parliament includes a ceremonial search of the cellars beneath the Houses of Parliament by a detachment of The Queen's Body Guard of the Yeomen of the Guard as well as more thorough/practical searches carried out by the security services<sup>385</sup>.

The next chapter will continue to explore Anonymous' history by picking up where chapter 4 left of. At the end of 2010 Anonymous were riding high on a wave of high-profile attacks against Hollywood and the US government, becoming quasi-criminal celebrities in their own right. The beguiling and tantalisingly cryptic persona of Anonymous drew fans and critics alike towards a form of media-aware and verbose hacker activism which had not been seen before. Anonymous feeds off independently developing crises and political drama, both of which would be provided in ample quantities during the wave of protests and civil unrest across North Africa in early 2011. During the Arab Spring a number of gifted young people would come together to break Anonymous' reactionary cycle, revolutionise Anonymous' internal organisation and raise the stakes higher than they had ever been; LulzSec. The next chapter will examine the lasting repercussions and aftermath of their dramatic rise and fall over the course of 2011, as well as the lasting implications which can still be seen to this day.

384 Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 61-62.

385 Kate Proctor, "Everything you need to know about the State Opening of Parliament 2016," *The Yorkshire Post*, last modified May 18, 2016, <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-state-opening-of-parliament-2016-1-7916532>.

## Chapter Six – Serious business and the end of the lulz

So far this research has explored two of the four distinct periods of Anonymous' history; the first covers the creation of 4chan in 2003 to the build-up to Project Chanology in 2008. The second begins with Project Chanology in early 2008 and lasts throughout Anonymous' uneven escalation via a steady supply of fresh nemeses until Operation Payback and Operation Avenge Assange in 2010. The focus of the third period this chapter will explore covers the rise of splinter group LulzSec in 2011, their summer of internet rock-star fame and their ultimate undoing.

Chapter 4 left Anonymous at the end of 2010, a moment in their history when the Anonymous identity was riding the momentum of Operations Payback and Avenge Assange; a shooting gallery of targets including recording and film industries around the world and the government of the United States. Thanks to a fortunate convergence of events momentum would be built on throughout the first half of 2011. Rather than simply making hyperbolic threats on YouTube Anonymous inserted themselves into the wider political context of the popular uprisings across North Africa known as the Arab Spring. Later in 2011 Anonymous publicly and spectacularly dismantled a defence contractor who claimed to have infiltrated/unmasked Anonymous. Returning to familiar issues of copyright Anonymous were then involved in a damaging and embarrassing attack on Sony's PlayStation Network as part of a wider reaction to the balkanisation of consumer technology and to what degree we own the electronic equipment we purchase. Anonymous' hubris throughout this period was tempered by a number of emerging problems which, with hindsight, were portentous warnings for their future.

A small group of Anons were contributing to the 'war effort' on many of these operations. After coming together to support Anonymous' operations during the Arab Spring they would take to the world stage as LulzSec; a close-knit and skilled hacker crew who would take on the world in a 50-day hacking spree over the summer of 2011. LulzSec's autonomous campaign would briefly resurrect the spirit of 'old Anonymous', showing that they were the final boss of the internet and everything was permitted for the sake of the lulz. At the time it was easy to think Anonymous were invincible after collecting a large and impressive collection of digital scalps in the space of a couple of years. As with all aspects of

Anonymous, LulzSec could not last forever; their Icarian trajectory was the apex of what Anonymous could achieve and unintentionally exposed the long-running flaws and weaknesses already discussed in this research. Throughout their short but active lifespan one of LulzSec's had been arrested and coerced into acting as a mole for the FBI. LulzSec were eventually arrested as a direct result of the information provided through this informant. Once news of this betrayal became public it had a dramatic effect on the collective and previously implicit trust which kept those within Anonymous together. This undermining of trust and cohesion was a major contributing factor to Anonymous' major operations focussing on targets further afield; foreign governments, political crises and world events Anonymous could make themselves relevant to with little to fear in terms of legal reciprocity. Anonymous-authored operations continued to be directed against Western corporations and governments; however they were less confrontational in tone and intent, focussing on distributing information which had already been made public but not widely known about.

#### Wikileaks, Tunisia and LulzSec

At the end of 2010 Anonymous were on a roll. Operation Payback was a retaliation against the entertainment industry for launching DDOS attacks of its own against file-sharing websites with impunity. Although it had minimal impact on its targets Operation Payback generated column inches and news stories about Anonymous, fuelling the feedback loop of positive reinforcement through constant reports and discussions in the wider social media space. Operation Payback's momentum and notoriety meant when Wikileaks and Julian Assange came under political and legal pressure for their own whistle-blowing activities the operation could expand to encompass new stimuli, resulting in Operation Avenge Assange<sup>386</sup>. As with all of Anonymous' other campaigns, Operation Avenge Assange eventually ran out of momentum<sup>387</sup>. However, in another example global events working in Anonymous' favour, the political tensions which had been building across North Africa and the Middle East throughout 2010 eventually broke in a domino effect of riots, civil wars and mass protests.

Bolstered by information found in diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks and the public self-immolation of fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi Anonymous announced 'Operation Tunisia'.

386 Gabriella Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous* (United Kingdom: Verso Books, 2015), 121-123.

387 Parry Olson, *We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous and the Global Cyber Insurgency* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2013), 39.

This would follow the now standard template for Anonymous' operations with some alterations. Anonymous planned a DDOS and data-dumping campaign against the Tunisian government to increase global awareness of the plight of the Tunisian people<sup>388</sup>, as well as to boost Anonymous' own reputation and popularity. The Tunisian digital communications infrastructure was the one of the most developed but also one of the most closely monitored and controlled in North Africa<sup>389</sup>. In early 2011 these measures appeared to be increasing in scope and magnitude, moving from simply blocking content deemed inappropriate or dangerous to actively stealing user-names and passwords for sites like Facebook<sup>390</sup>.

Rather than a mass participatory operation which Anonymous invited anyone and everyone to participate in, Operation Tunisia was organised and controlled by small groups, organisers and PR representatives<sup>391</sup>. Hector Monsegur ('Sabu'), Mustafa Al-Bassam ('Tflow'), Jake Davis ('Tapiary') and Ryan Ackroyd ('Kayla') wrote programs and computer scripts to bypass the internet filtering systems put in place by the Tunisian government. DDOS attacks temporarily disrupted the websites of the President, Prime Minister, the Ministry of Industry the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Tunisian stock exchange<sup>392</sup>. Although these attacks were quickly mitigated, Sabu managed to negotiate remote access to a computer physically located inside Tunisia and was able to launch further attacks which bypassed the government's mitigation efforts<sup>393</sup>.

The organisational changes seen in Operation Tunisia drove its organisation and execution away from the emergent self-organisation of IRC channels towards a more insular team-based approach. Operation Tunisia took advantage of the competition between global media to cover the spreading civil unrest and anti-government uprisings across North Africa as timely and exhaustively as possible. If we look again at Tunisia we can see that the issues being reported and fervently opposed by Anonymous have been extant problems in the country for decades beforehand. After gaining power in 1989 President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's government ratified laws which legitimised intrusive surveillance operations. In addition to powers such as

388 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy*, 148-154.

389 "Tunisia," *OpenNet Initiative*, posted August 7, 2009, <https://opennet.net/research/profiles/tunisia>.

390 Olson, *We Are Anonymous*, 39.

391 Ibid., 154.

392 Yasmine Ryan, "Tunisia's bitter cyberwar," *Al Jazeera*, posted January 6, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/20111614145839362.html>.

393 *We Are Anonymous*, 39.

being able to intercept and read any email<sup>394</sup> the Tunisian Internet Agency (ATI) was given control of Tunisia's internet infrastructure and was the sole leaser of bandwidth to Internet Service Providers (ISPs)<sup>395</sup>. Additionally widespread internet filtering and censorship systems were implemented, the media came under government control and bloggers who spoke out against the government were arrested<sup>396</sup>.

All of this had been taking place twenty years before Project Chanology and almost 15 years before the creation of 4chan. The accelerating civil unrest seen in the Arab Spring was the boiling over of popular unrest at the unassailable power held by the governments of countries like Tunisia. It was only when these tensions were made overtly public through dramatic scenes of crowds in the streets that the attention of the news and social media picked up on it. Even then it was only once the Arab Spring had resonated through the media space that Operation Tunisia could take place. This is one of Anonymous' serious yet incurable weaknesses. Anonymous' most popular operations with the most longevity have been in response to political situations, other protests or controversial legislation/leaks already gaining traction on news and social media channels. Anonymous have launched operations against targets and in support of causes which had not been under the spotlight of the news media. These normally produce YouTube videos declaring intent and the occasional Twitter hashtag, but they are quickly forgotten. As with their adoption of the Guy Fawkes mask and the symbolic language of V for Vendetta, Anonymous' operations can only gain momentum when they are positioned as force multipliers for causes and events which are developing autonomously. This explains why Anonymous is so hard to define; it is a brand of universal resistance which defines itself almost entirely through positioning itself relative to whatever targets become available. This characteristic of Anonymous' operational strategy; absorbing and re-purposing external sources has been with Anonymous throughout their history, a leftover trait from their image-board origins.

Operation Tunisia expanded as the waves of popular protests and uprisings spread eastwards across North Africa and the typically dynastic/military-run governments of the countries involved responded.. In an attempt to stop protesters organising and sharing footage of

394 Ronald Deibert, *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace* (United States of America: MIT Press, 2010), 528.

395 "Tunisia," *OpenNet Initiative*.

396 Ibid.



demonstrations the Egyptian government restricted and eventually cut off domestic internet access completely<sup>397</sup>. Anonymous responded to this by turning into Operation Tunisia into Operation Egypt. As with Operation Tunisia, Operation Egypt consisted of DDOS attacks against government websites and helping local activists negate government censorship and internet filtering systems<sup>398</sup>, accompanied up with statements of solidarity in the form of YouTube videos and images criticising the Egyptian government<sup>399</sup>:



However the Arab Spring soon had to continue without Anonymous; in early February 2011 both of these operations were eclipsed by something that was impossible for Anonymous to ignore. On February 5 2011 the CEO of US government-contracted security firm HBGary Federal, Aaron Barr, made an audacious statement in an article published in the Financial Times. He claimed to used social engineering to acquire personal information which could be used to identify key Anonymous activists. He intended to sell this information to the FBI, the Director of National Intelligence and the US military in order to secure US government defence contracts and funding in the future<sup>400</sup>.

397 Paul Wagenseil, "Anonymous 'hacktivists' attack Egyptian websites," *NBC News*, last modified January 26, 2011, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/41280813/ns/technology\\_and\\_science-security/t/anonymous-hacktivists-attack-egyptian-websites/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/41280813/ns/technology_and_science-security/t/anonymous-hacktivists-attack-egyptian-websites/).

398 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower*, *Spy*, 191.

399 Fahmida Y Rashid, "Spanish Police Arrest Anonymous Operation Hackers," *TechWeek Europe*, posted June 12, 2011, <http://www.techweekeurope.co.uk/workspace/spanish-police-arrest-anonymous-operation-hackers-31530>.

400 Peter Bright, "Anonymous speaks: the inside story of the HBGary hack," *ArsTechnica*, posted February 16, 2011, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2011/02/anonymous-speaks-the-inside-story-of-the-hbgary-hack/>.

Less than 24 hours after the article was published Anonymous had retaliated against the first existential threat they had ever faced. 60,000 internal emails were taken and made public and Aaron Barr's was doxxed<sup>401</sup>. The information that he was planning to use as leverage for contract deals with the US government was made public, alongside claims it was largely erroneous<sup>402</sup>. This was not the end of the ordeal for HBGary or Aaron Barr; the contents of the leaked emails also revealed several other interesting secrets. HBGary was working with law firm Hunton & Williams to conduct a smear campaign against WikiLeaks ahead of an expected publication of confidential bank files. This campaign would have involved finding compromising or embarrassing information about Wikileaks staff as well as submitting fake or erroneous documents to Wikileaks to undermine their credibility from within<sup>403</sup>. Throughout February 2011 HBGary's partner companies and interests implicated in the leaked emails distanced themselves from both Barr and the company. Barr resigned from his position as CEO on February 28, stating 'I need to focus on taking care of my family and rebuilding my reputation'<sup>404</sup>.

Events outside of Anonymous' control would continue to provide them with new targets, including one much closer to their A-cultural roots. Soon after launching the PlayStation 3 video games console in 2007 Sony promoted the fact that users could install an additional Linux-based operating system, turning what is traditionally a closed system into a form of home computer<sup>405</sup>. This feature was praised by small-scale amateur programmers and bedroom developers all the way up to the United States Air Force. In a cost-saving measure the USAF connected 1,716 PlayStation 3 consoles together, creating an image-processing supercomputer rated as one of top 40 supercomputers in the world at the time<sup>406</sup>. In March

401 Jerome Taylor, "Anonymous hits security firm HBGary Federal," *The Independent*, posted February 7, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/anonymous-hits-security-firm-hbgary-federal-2207309.html>.

402 Joe Coscarelli, "Aaron Barr of HBGary Steps Down After Battle With Hacker Group Anonymous," *The Village Voice*, posted March 1, 2011, <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/aaron-barr-of-hbgary-steps-down-after-battle-with-hacker-group-anonymous-6705975>.

403 John Leyden, "Anonymous security firm hack used every trick in book," *The Register*, posted February 17, 2011, [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2011/02/17/hbgary\\_hack\\_redux/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2011/02/17/hbgary_hack_redux/).

404 Paul Roberts, "HBGary Federal CEO Aaron Barr Steps Down," *Threat Post*, posted February 28, 2011, <https://threatpost.com/hbgary-federal-ceo-aaron-barr-steps-down-022811/74971/>.

405 Kurt Opsahl, "PlayStation 3 "Other OS" Saga Shows: Jailbreaking Is Not a Crime," *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, posted February 6, 2012, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/02/playstation-3-other-os-saga-jailbreaking-not-crime>.

406 Kyle Thibaut, "'Condor' Supercomputer Made of 1,716 PS3s Now Online," *Tech Crunch*, posted March 25, 2011, <http://techcrunch.com/2011/03/25/condor-supercomputer-made-of-1716-ps3s-now-online/>.

2010 a mandatory update for the PlayStation 3's firmware removed this feature. There were loopholes in the software and ways around the update however Sony sued the security researchers who found and spread the word about how to use them<sup>407</sup>.

Someone else targeted by Sony was George Hotz, a hacker who had built his reputation on getting past the security of typically closed systems and computer products such as the iPhone. In January 2011 he successfully re-implemented the PlayStation 3's 'OtherOS' functionality by reverse engineering its closed and copyrighted operating system. This case eventually came to Anonymous' attention and the subsequent 'Message to Sony' video presented a range of accusations comparing the case against Hotz to being 'punished for installing or deleting programs' on a computer and highlighting how Sony were tracking anyone visiting Hotz's website regardless of whether they acted on his information or not<sup>408</sup>. Protests were planned to take place outside Sony stores in the United States and Europe on April 16 2011. A Sony store in Manchester, England was closed and police officers were stationed outside<sup>409</sup>:



407 Corynne McSherry and Marcia Hofman, "Sony v. Hotz: Sends A Dangerous Message to Researchers – and Its Customers," *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, posted January 19, 2011, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2011/01/sony-v-hotz-sony-sends-dangerous-message>.

408 Subscribe. "Anonymous: Message To Sony," YouTube video, 1:00, posted April 6, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMhYrJEg1g4>.

409 Brian Ashcraft, "So How Was That Anonymous Sony Protest?," *Kotaku*, posted April 18, 2011, <http://kotaku.com/5792968/so-how-was-that-anonymous-sony-protest>.

Leaflets were handed out at others<sup>410</sup>;



In the United States the protests were almost a complete failure. Comments from the now inaccessible Facebook page for the protests taken at the time indicate how much of an ‘epic fail’ the planned demonstrations were:

I went to the Sony Outlet in San Diego in the San Ysidro mall. No One was there. I didn't have materials to make signs. I didn't have the ink to print fliers. I don't own a mask. And NO ONE was there. Do you know what I did? at first I waited, then I stood outside the store and I talked to people. I stood there, alone, simply asking people to listen and telling them what was happening.<sup>411</sup>

One attendee failed to grasp the concept of the boycott/protest, coming away with a new Sony television:

Just went to a Sony store for the first time in my life! Bought a Bravia :)<sup>412</sup>

The accompanying small-scale DDOS attacks against Sony's websites and PlayStation Network quickly halted after widespread condemnation that Anonymous were only negatively impacting their own constituency and support base rather than having any effect on Sony's

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Geoffrey Tim, "How not to stage a protest; How anonymous' Sony boycott failed," *Lazygamer*, posted April 18, 2011,

<http://www.lazygamer.net/24/how-not-to-stage-a-protest-how-anonymous-sony-boycott-failed/>.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

litigious campaign against Hotz et al for reverse engineering the PlayStation 3. This situation had barely de-escalated when an attack which has since become known as one of the largest ever recorded thefts of electronic data came out of nowhere. During April 2011 the personal information of approximately 100 million Sony customers was taken from the PlayStation Network and Sony Online Entertainment services, including an unknown number of credit card details. Sony took both services offline for over a month to rectify the cause and begin public relations damage control<sup>413</sup>. Both of these attacks took place within a short space of time and Anonymous appeared to be the culprits. A lengthy Anonymous-authored statement claimed that Anonymous has never engaged in credit card theft as this goes against their collective beliefs and that this attack was aimed at a service used by many Anons themselves<sup>414</sup>.

Anonymous is a set of ideas and symbols which have taken on a life of their own through their attachment to political causes. However many Anonymous-identifying Twitter accounts and YouTube channels claim to be 'official' there is no central body one has to apply to to become Anonymous. It is therefore possible that the Sony hack was carried out for financial gains and the respect of other hackers around the world by people who were interpreting Anonymous in their own way, whatever that may be. Sony allegedly found a 'calling card', a text file left on their system stating that Anonymous were responsible. To this day the secondary motivations of the perpetrators remain a mystery; as of 2016 there have been no arrests or convictions for the attack. Sony testified before the United States Congress and was also fined £250,000 by the UK Information Commissioner's Office<sup>415</sup>.

413 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower*, *Spy*, 246.

414 Chloe Albanesius, "Did Anonymous Hack Sony's PlayStation Network or Not?" *PC Magazine*, posted May 4, 2011, <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2384919,00.asp>.

415 Coleman, 247.



## LulzSec

All of the above events took place semi-concurrently over the first half of 2011. Their chronological presentation herein unnaturally separates overlapping operations, expertise and assets were transferred between activist groups and hacker crews as necessary. Several usernames/handles begin to crop up with increasing frequency among the surviving internet chat records and documents from the time; Topiary (Jake Davis), tflow (Mustafa Al-Bassam), Sabu (Hector Monsegur) and Kayla (Ryan Ackroyd). They worked together for Operation Tunisia, Operation Egypt and the breaking of HBGary Federal, forming 'LulzSec' around the same time as the Sony attacks in April 2011. At this point they were simply one hacking crew among many, who often adopted their own distinct iconography to affiliate or distance themselves from Anonymous. In LulzSec's case this was a moustachioed figure holding a glass of wine<sup>416</sup>:



LulzSec may have begun as one of many hacking crews; they quickly distinguished themselves through their rejection of Anonymous' typically reactive and pre-emptively hyperbolic methods. Rather than announcing operations through videos and press releases beforehand, LulzSec conducted their operations in secret and announced their successes after the fact. In early June 2011 LulzSec began a 50-day campaign of aggressive website defacement and information leaks. An exhaustive discussion of LulzSec's victims throughout the summer of 2011 would require more space than this chapter can provide, however there are specific targets worth mentioning to highlight how far Anonymous and its affiliated

416 Graham Cluley, "The LulzSec hackers who boasted they were "Gods" await their sentence," *Naked Security*, posted May 16, 2013, <https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2013/05/16/lulzsec-hackers-wait-sentence/>.



groups had come since Project Chanology in 2008. One of the first targets LulzSec chose was Infragard, an FBI-affiliated organisation who operated as a liaison between the US government and private counter-terrorism and security companies like HBGary Federal, who LulzSec attacked on June 3 2011<sup>417</sup>. Several days later LulzSec responded to a challenge by Black & Berg Cybersecurity Consulting who offered a \$10,000 and a job for anyone who could hack the main page of their website. LulzSec quickly hacked Black & Berg on June 8 2011, leaving the message 'DONE, THAT WAS EASY. KEEP YOUR MONEY WE DO IT FOR THE LULZ [sic]'<sup>418</sup>.

The following day, June 9, LulzSec displayed a moment of unusual altruism. As part of their trawling of the internet for easy or topical victims they found serious security vulnerabilities in the computer systems of Britain's National Health Service. Rather than attacking the NHS LulzSec sent this information to its IT department with instructions on how to improve security<sup>419</sup>. Throughout June 2011 LulzSec's attacked larger targets with increasing frequency. On June 13 LulzSec leaked email addresses, passwords and part of the root directory access to the United States Senate's website, doing the same to the CIA's website on June 16<sup>420</sup>.

On June 20 Anonymous and LulzSec announced they were collaborating for Operation AntiSec, bringing LulzSec's brazen and proactive methodology to the wider Anonymous community<sup>421</sup>, and is an example of one of the few times Anonymous' intrinsic weakness of reacting to external events was alleviated in a way which delivered real results. The press releases for Operation AntiSec claimed it was going to strike a balance between Anonymous' traditional hedonistic desire for lulz with a more serious political angle:

417 "LulzSec claims to have hacked FBI-affiliated website," *LA Times*, posted June 3, 2011, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2011/06/lulz-security-claims-to-have-hacked-fbi-affiliated-website-.html>.

418 Hao Li, "LulzSec wins hacking competition, refuses \$10k award," *International Business Times*, posted June 8, 2011, <http://www.ibtimes.com/lulzsec-wins-hacking-competition-refuses-10k-award-289307>.

419 "Hackers warn NHS over security," *BBC News*, posted June 9, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-13712377>.

420 "LulzSec hackers claim CIA website shutdown," *BBC News*, posted June 16, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-13787229>.

421 Nick Ross, "Lulzsec teams up with Anonymous," *ABC News*, posted June 20, 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/technology/articles/2011/06/20/3248520.htm>.

Welcome to Operation Anti-Security (#AntiSec)—we encourage any vessel, large or small, to open fire on any government or agency that crosses their path. We fully endorse the flaunting of the word “AntiSec” on any government website defacement or physical graffiti art.

Whether you’re sailing with us or against us, whether you hold past grudges or a burning desire to sink our lone ship, we invite you to join the rebellion. Together we can defend ourselves so that our privacy is not overrun by profiteering gluttons. Your hat can be white, gray or black, your skin and race are not important. If you’re aware of the corruption, expose it now, in the name of Anti-Security.

Top priority is to steal and leak any classified government information, including email spools and documentation. Prime targets are banks and other high-ranking establishments. If they try to censor our progress, we will obliterate the censor with cannon fire anointed with lizard blood.

It’s now or never. Come aboard, we’re expecting you.<sup>422</sup>

Operation AntiSec ran throughout 2011 and included targets such as the US military<sup>423</sup> and multinational oil companies<sup>424</sup>. LulzSec’s bravado and near-constant stream of high-profile attacks turned them into internet celebrities whose Robin Hood-like campaigns inspired other groups to emulate their success<sup>425</sup>. LulzSec celebrated their 1000<sup>th</sup> Tweet in June with the following statement:

...Most of you reading this love the idea of wrecking someone else's online experience anonymously. It's appealing and unique, there are no two account hijackings that are the same, no two suddenly enraged girlfriends with the same expression when you admit to killing prostitutes from her boyfriend's recently stolen MSN account, and there's certainly no limit to the lulz lizardry [sic] that we all partake in on some level.

And that's all there is to it, that's what appeals to our Internet generation. We're attracted to fast-changing scenarios, we can't stand repetitiveness, and we want our shot of entertainment or we just go and browse something else, like an unimpressed zombie<sup>426</sup>.

This statement provides an unusually self-critical insight into the beguiling hedonism which has underpinned Anonymous since the beginning. It addresses the chronically short attention

422 “Operation Anti-Security,” *Pastebin*, posted June 19, 2011, <http://pastebin.com/9KyA0E5v>.

423 Elizabeth Montalbano, “AntiSec Hacks Booz Allen, Posts Confidential Military Email,” *Dark Reading*, posted July 12, 2011, <http://www.darkreading.com/attacks-and-breaches/antisecc-hacks-booz-allen-posts-confidential-military-email/d/d-id/1098865?>

424 Elinor Mills, “Anonymous targets Monsanto, oil firms,” *Cnet*, posted July 12, 2011, <http://www.cnet.com/news/anonymous-targets-monsanto-oil-firms/>.

425 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower*, *Spy*, 283.

426 Nate Anderson, “LulzSec manifesto: “We screw each other over for a jolt of satisfaction,”” *ArsTechnica*, posted June 17, 2011, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2011/06/lulzsec-heres-why-we-hack-you-bitches/>.

span of Anonymous as a product of their online formative environment as well as the lack of human empathy shown in our online interactions; that other people online are somehow less than real. As abruptly as LulzSec's campaign had begun, a press release on June 25 announced it was coming to an end:

For the past 50 days we've been disrupting and exposing corporations, governments, often the general population itself, and quite possibly everything in between, just because we could. All to selflessly entertain others – vanity, fame, recognition, all of these things are shadowed by our desire for that which we all love. The raw, uninterrupted, chaotic thrill of entertainment and anarchy. It's what we all crave, even the seemingly lifeless politicians and emotionless, middle-aged self-titled failures. You are not failures. You have not blown away. You can get what you want and you are worth having it, believe in yourself.

While we are responsible for everything that The Lulz Boat is, we are not tied to this identity permanently. Behind this jolly visage of rainbows and top hats, we are people. People with a preference for music, a preference for food; we have varying taste in clothes and television, we are just like you. Even Hitler and Osama Bin Laden had these unique variations and style, and isn't that interesting to know? The mediocre painter turned supervillain liked cats more than we did.

Again, behind the mask, behind the insanity and mayhem, we truly believe in the AntiSec movement. We believe in it so strongly that we brought it back, much to the dismay of those looking for more anarchic lulz. We hope, wish, even beg, that the movement manifests itself into a revolution that can continue on without us. The support we've gathered for it in such a short space of time is truly overwhelming, and not to mention humbling. Please don't stop. Together, united, we can stomp down our common oppressors and imbue ourselves with the power and freedom we deserve<sup>427</sup>.

This statement can be seen as a continuation of their 1000<sup>th</sup> Tweet message, making points which relate to common elements of Anonymous' publicised ideology; a mixture of topics such as the plurality of identity, nondescript resistance against authority and the entertainment value of their actions. LulzSec's targets were chosen opportunistically and with no pretext or previously aired grievance, however they were a major example of Anonymous-identifying or associated activists operating with the kind of self-driven agency Anonymous' operations had always lacked. Their hyperactive but brief burst of old-fashioned lulz was a throwback to Anonymous' roots, showing that despite the upsurge in 'moralfaggotry' Anonymous still knew how to have a good time. However, there was more to LulzSec's sudden cessation of operations than the usual decay of interest among those involved or the changing focus of the

427 "50 Days of Lulz," *Pastebin*, posted June 25, 2011, <http://pastebin.com/1znEGmHa>.

Internet's short attention span. LulzSec's protracted and messy fall from grace would have long-lasting and damaging effects on the Anonymous identity, effects which are still visible today.

### The end of the Lulz

LulzSec and Operation AntiSec had recaptured the spirit of the lulz, exposed corporate and governmental wrongdoing and demonstrated that many of the services we use on a daily basis are not as secure as we expect and hope them to be. In doing so LulzSec had riled a long list of powerful enemies; multinational corporations, governments and security services around the world. Based on the above statement it appeared as if LulzSec had gotten away with it. Unbeknownst to them, the wider Anonymous constituency and the rest of the world LulzSec had been compromised almost from the beginning.

In real life 'Sabu' was Hector Xavier Monsegur, an unemployed foster father of his incarcerated aunt's children who lived in New York City<sup>428</sup>. He had gotten involved with Anonymous through Operation Tunisia as well as the HBGary attacks. Hector forgot to mask his IP address when logging on to an IRC channel<sup>429</sup> and a subsequent subpoena of his Facebook account revealed to the FBI that he had been selling stolen credit card details. He was arrested on June 7 2011, before the majority of LulzSec's attacks as well as the announcement of Operation AntiSec two weeks later. Facing the threat of being taken away from his family Monsegur became an informant for the FBI<sup>430</sup>. He was directed to warn certain targets ahead of an impending attack, influence the direction of operations to focus on specific targets<sup>431</sup> as well as acquire evidence on the other members of LulzSec, all of whom were arrested over the following months.

428 N.R. Kleinfield and Somini Sengupta, "Hacker informant and party boy of the projects," *The New York Times*, posted September 3, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/09/technology/hacker-informant-and-party-boy-of-the-projects.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/09/technology/hacker-informant-and-party-boy-of-the-projects.html?_r=0).

429 Parmy Olson, *We Are Anonymous*, 81.

430 Jana Winter, "EXCLUSIVE: Infamous international hacking group LulzSec brought down by own leader," *Fox News*, posted March 6, 2012, <http://www.foxnews.com/tech/2012/03/06/hacking-group-lulzsec-swept-up-by-law-enforcement/?intcmp=related>.

431 Zeljka Zorz, "FBI informant Sabu directed hacking of foreign govt sites," *Helpnet Security*, posted April 24, 2014, <https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2014/04/24/fbi-informant-sabu-directed-hacking-of-foreign-govt-sites/>.

Anonymous' cellular structure worked in their favour. LulzSec shutting down had no direct strategic or tactical effect on the other crews or the extant operations<sup>432</sup>. The damage from the high-profile arrests of Anonymous' most infamous hacking crew was to collective morale, although at the time it hadn't been revealed that Sabu was responsible. As the members of LulzSec were arrested throughout the rest of 2011 Anonymous' operations shifted back away from launching direct attacks themselves towards their previous position of acting as a force multiplier or an allied cohort to independently developing situations external to themselves.

On August 11 2011 a public protest in San Francisco aimed to publicise the shooting of a homeless man by the police force of the Bay Area Rapid Transit system (BART). This was not the first example of such a protest taking place in the city, however what drew Anonymous' attention was the decision by the BART authorities to block phone and internet signals in stations near the protesters<sup>433</sup>. This was the type of familiar and easy situation the now wounded Anonymous needed to recover momentum through; an organisation restricting information access and shutting down communication systems to de-escalate an embarrassing situation through silence. Once Anonymous got wind of this:

Announcements of action on behalf of the anti-BART protesters began pouring onto YouTube; Anti-BART anon accounts opened on Twitter; #OpBart formed on IRC. Over the next month, Anon hackers attacked the ill-defended BART and MyBART websites and did data dumps, and in one nadir moment that caused a public fight among anons, attempted to blackmail BART spokesman Linton Johnson into resigning after finding and threatening to post explicit pictures of him, which they eventually did<sup>434</sup>.

As with all of Anonymous' operations, the Twitter hashtags and IRC channels began to die down once organisational momentum slowed. Anonymous had broken into the BART networks and wreaked havoc; however this was the limit of their involvement in what was a localised, physical and one-note protest. Despite the damage caused by the fall of LulzSec there were still enough active Anons to pick up on fresh stimuli and sources of operational momentum. In September 2011 the emerging Occupy movement provided an opportunity to interface with a protest movement which shared several similarities with Anonymous; a

432 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower*, *Spy*, 156.

433 Brian B. Kelly, "Investing in a Centralized Cybersecurity Infrastructure: Why "Hacktivism" Can and Should Influence Cybersecurity Reform," *Boston University Law Review* 92, no. 5 (2012): 1666.

434 Quinn Norton, "2011: The Year Anonymous Took On Cops, Dictators And Existential Dread," *Wired*, posted January 11, 2012, <http://www.wired.com/2012/01/anonymous-dictators-existential-dread/3/>.

decentralised ‘people’s’ movement who defined themselves in opposition to the ‘1%’; acting as facilitators and contact nodes of influence<sup>435</sup>. Three years into Anonymous’ operational life it would be easy to be apathetic about their usual doomsday rhetoric channelled through YouTube videos claiming that Anonymous would ‘occupy Wall Street for a few months’ and ‘On October 10th, NYSE shall be erased from the Internet’. As with the overuse of offensive language on 4chan to the point that it lost all pejorative context, it would be easy to criticise Anonymous’ rhetoric as one-note and prosaic. The reaction from the Department of Homeland Security was indicative that this form of grandiose and theatrical trolling was still capable of capturing the attention of their targets and goading them into lulz-worthy overreaction<sup>436</sup>:



Subsequent YouTube videos presented declarations of intent for attacks throughout September and into early October 2011 against the New York Stock Exchange and the New York Police Department, however none of them materialised in any meaningful way<sup>437</sup>. Anonymous conducted Operation BART and engaged with Occupy as an online component of physically located protests rubbing against the police as the physical presence of the state, an environment where Anonymous’ hacking skills were at their least effective. At this point Project Chanology was a distant memory; the aforementioned examples of the Sony boycott and their involvement with Occupy show that engaging with physical protests was one of Anonymous’ most overt and embarrassing weaknesses. Fortunately for Anonymous events outside their control once again provided a major source of reactionary power and organisational momentum which their focus could be redirected towards.

435 Saki Knafo, “Occupy Wall Street And Anonymous: Turning A Fledgling Movement Into a Meme,” *The Huffington Post*, posted October 20, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/20/occupy-wall-street-anonymous-connection\\_n\\_1021665.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/20/occupy-wall-street-anonymous-connection_n_1021665.html).

436 Sean Captain, “The Real Role of Anonymous In Occupy Wall Street,” *Fast Company*, posted October 18, 2011, <http://www.fastcompany.com/1788397/real-role-anonymous-occupy-wall-street>.

437 Sean Captain, “The Real Role of Anonymous In Occupy Wall Street.”



Since 2005 the file-sharing service Megaupload had been a thorn in the side of copyright industry and intellectual property holders around the world and one of the most visited websites on the internet. Based on accusations of profiting from piracy with estimated collective damages estimated at \$500,000,000, the US Department of Justice took over and shut down the site in January 2012<sup>438</sup>. Everything stored on Megaupload was kept to be used as evidence, regardless of its legality. The legal battle over the eventual fate of that data, the site's founder and former owner Kim Dotcom (originally Kim Schmitz) and his personal fortune are ongoing as of 2016<sup>439</sup>. At the same time as Megaupload was seized in January 2012 the US government was pushing to ratify the highly controversial Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and Protect IP Act (PIPA) legislation which was criticised for promoting the interests of Hollywood and the copyright industry over an individual's rights to privacy<sup>440</sup>. On January 18 2012 an internet-wide blackout protest demonstrated what the internet might be like if SOPA and PIPA were passed<sup>441</sup>. The following day Anonymous launched a wide-reaching DDOS campaign in retaliation at the seizing of Megaupload which included some familiar adversaries; the MPAA, RIAA, US Department of Justice and Universal Music<sup>442</sup>.

Two months later, in March 2012 the details of Sabu's betrayal and undermining of LulzSec started coming to light including how Sabu's intelligence on an attack against security firm Stratfor in 2011 led to the arrest of prominent activist Jeremy Hammond, who is now serving a ten year prison sentence<sup>443</sup>. The fallout from these revelations was an example of how effective sowing suspicion and mistrust among an already decentralised and physically dislocated group such as Anonymous can be. The publicising of Sabu's betrayal caused a further change in Anonymous' operations; a process best illustrated through two of Anonymous' operations towards the end of 2012.

438 [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/business/documents/megaupload\\_indictment.pdf](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/business/documents/megaupload_indictment.pdf)

439 Ernesto Van der Sar, "If Extradited, How Might Kim Dotcom Be Treated in the US?," *Torrentfreak*, posted June 27, 2016, <https://torrentfreak.com/if-extradited-how-might-kim-dotcom-be-treated-in-the-us-160627/>.

440 Larry Magrid, "What Are SOPA and PIPA And Why All The Fuss?," *Forbes Tech*, posted January 18, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/larrymagrid/2012/01/18/what-are-sopa-and-pipa-and-why-all-the-fuss/>.

441 Steven Musil, "Wikipedia to join Web blackout protesting SOPA," *Cnet*, posted January 16, 2012, <http://www.cnet.com/uk/news/wikipedia-to-join-web-blackout-protesting-sopa/>.

442 "#OpMegaupload," *Pastebin*, posted January 19, 2012, <http://pastebin.com/WeydcBVV>.

443 "Sentenced to 10 Years in Prison, Jeremy Hammond Uses Allocution to Give Consequential Statement Highlighting Global Criminal Exploits by FBI Handlers," *The Sparrow Project*, posted November 15, 2013, <http://www.sparrowmedia.net/2013/11/jeremy-hammond-sentence/>.

### **The Path of Least Resistance**

As discussed in the previous chapter November 5 is remembered in Britain as the day in 1605 when a group of Catholic conspirators tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament. For Anonymous it became a narrative which could be easily filtered through the appropriated pop culture imagery of V for Vendetta. Anonymous leaned on the imagery and cultural memory of Guy Fawkes and its association with the film to contextualise a new global physical protest movement of their own. Anonymous had attempted to tie operations to November 5 before by attacking Facebook on November 5 2011 however this failed to materialise<sup>444</sup>. The following year Operation Vendetta promoted as a campaign of large-scale protests in cities around the world and, as discussed in the previous chapter, a meta re-enactment of the final scenes from the film<sup>445</sup>.

On the afternoon of November 5 2012 protesters wearing Guy Fawkes masks and carrying banners with slogans denouncing austerity measures, globalisation, bank bonuses, fox hunting, MP expenses, pharmaceutical animal testing, the war in Syria, nuclear weapons and more congregated in Trafalgar Square in central London; a scene which was replicated in major cities around the world. At 8pm the massed crowds marched down Whitehall, a sea of white, plastic faces blocking traffic and chanting 'Whose streets? Our streets!' stopping only to jeer at Downing Street and the perplexed armed police officers at the gates on their way to Parliament Square and the Houses of Parliament.

As discussed above regarding Anonymous' involvement with Occupy, physical protests like Operation Vendetta show that Anonymous are at their weakest when interacting with 'the people' who they claim to fight for and in the name of. The above spectrum of causes held together by the idiosyncratic language and imagery of internet culture was an accurate physical representation of Anonymous that demonstrated another of Anonymous' fundamental problems; translating its output into something understandable, in this case, by the literal 'man in the street'.

444 Ellis Hamburger, "Hacker Group Anonymous Vows To Destroy Facebook On November 5," *Business Insider*, posted August 9, 2011, <http://www.businessinsider.com/anonymous-facebook-2011-8>.

445 "Anonymous #OpVendetta set for 5<sup>th</sup> November," *Infosecurity Magazine*, posted October 2, 2012, <http://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/view/28552/anonymous-opvendetta-set-for-5th-november/>.

Throughout 2012 an increasing number of rocket attacks were launched into Israel from the Gaza Strip. In December 2012 the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) launched 'Operation Pillar Of Defense', an 8-day counter-offensive to destroy the launch sites in Gaza and prevent further attacks. What made this particular operation different was the role of social media. Both the IDF and Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades used Twitter to exchange insults and boasts<sup>446</sup>. What brought this to Anonymous attention was Israel's threat to cut off internet access to the Gaza Strip. Anonymous responded by defacing or DDOSing at least 700 Israeli government and military websites<sup>447</sup> and creating a 'Care Package'; guidance for avoiding internet filtering systems, how to use dial-up internet connections basic first aid information<sup>448</sup>. 4 months later, on April 8 2013, Anonymous launched Operation Israel to protest Israel's apparent war crimes and persecution of Palestinians. Operation Israel had little effect<sup>449</sup> but the choice of date was a brief return to the now long-dead practice of Ironisation; holding nothing sacred or taboo to make a political point. In this case it was an insinuation that the Israeli government was conducting barbarism and war crimes of their own.

This change of focus to Anonymous-orchestrated physical protests and looking further afield for online targets who were unlikely to retaliate such as Turkey<sup>450</sup>, North Korea<sup>451</sup>, Syria<sup>452</sup>, Russia<sup>453</sup> and Venezuela<sup>454</sup> were ways for Anonymous to process the saga of LulzSec, to regroup around new causes which would limit the possibility of repetition in the future and keep them in the media spotlight at the same time. This shift was the reason Anonymous also

446 Noah Shachtman and Robert Beckhusen, "Hamas Shoots Rockets at Tel Aviv, Tweeting Every Barrage," *Wired*, posted November 15, 2012, <http://www.wired.com/2012/11/gaza-social-media-war/>.

447 "Israel faces 44 million attacks on websites in response to Gaza offensive," *RT*, posted November 18, 2012, <http://rt.com/news/israel-cyber-hackers-gaza-000/>.

448 "Anonymous warns Israel: 'No one cuts internet on our watch!'," *RT*, posted November 15, 2012, <http://rt.com/news/gaza-israel-strike-anonymous-787/>.

449 Eli Lake, "Why #OpIsrael Was an #OpFail," *The Daily Beast*, posted April 8, 2013, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/04/08/why-opisrael-was-an-opfail.html>.

450 "Anonymous Turkey hacks PM Erdogan's office email accounts," *True Activist*, posted June 5, 2013, <http://www.trueactivist.com/anonymous-turkey-hacks-pm-erdogans-office-email-accounts/>.

451 "Anonymous 'hacks' North Korea social network accounts," *BBC News*, posted April 4, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-22025724>.

452 Steven Musil, "Anonymous declares war on Syrian government Web sites," *Cnet*, posted November 30, 2012, <http://www.cnet.com/uk/news/anonymous-declares-war-on-syrian-government-web-sites/#!>.

453 Lucian Ciolacu, "Anonymous Targets Russia Amid Ukraine Tension; Leaks Crownservice.ru Internal SQL Data," *Hot For Security*, posted March 5, 2014, <http://www.hotforsecurity.com/blog/anonymous-targets-russia-amid-ukraine-tension-leaks-crownservice-ru-internal-sql-data-8096.html>.

454 Andrew Rogers, "Anonymous attacks Venezuela govt websites," *BN Americas*, posted February 17, 2014, <http://www.bnamericas.com/news/technology/anonymous-attacks-venezuela-govt-websites>.

began attacking targets who were easier to morally justify. Hunter Moore had become known as ‘the most hated man on the internet’ through his ‘revenge porn’ empire; a network of websites which encouraged people to upload explicit pictures of former partners<sup>455</sup>.

Anonymous launched a DDOS attack against his websites and revealed his personal information:

December the 6th at approximately 2 am eastern time the team infiltrated the site and defaced it after a day of denial of service attacks on his servers, and his merchandise chain. We have backed up his entire archive to the web to preserve evidence. He has since restored an alternate version of his website with different text at the bottom. We will pursue access to his site and bring it down effectively. This is an update, a leak of proof and data that would otherwise be hidden from public view, of a team of anons who have worked day and night on this case, and who continue their vigilance even as this is written here today<sup>456</sup>.

These examples collectively show how much of Anonymous’ attention turned to ‘safe’ targets; authoritarian foreign regimes whose websites they can DDOS and deface with very little risk of reciprocity and deviants or criminals whose transgressions are almost universally vilified. There are further examples of this behaviour two years after LulzSec. Operation Safe Winter was launched in December 2013 to raise awareness and gather resources to help the homeless across the world by creating a support network much like Anonymous’ own; a horizontal, decentralised system to get aid to those who needed it rather than going through the bureaucracy of conventional channels<sup>457</sup>. Operation KillingBay was launched January 2014 to protest of the number of dolphins being killed by the Japanese fishing industry<sup>458</sup>. In March 2014 Anonymous attacked the Albuquerque State Police Department after footage of officers shooting a homeless man was shared online<sup>459</sup>. This type of scenario played to Anonymous’ strengths as whistle-blowers or a technologically capable force multiplier bringing issues to

455 Alex Morris, “Hunter Moore: The Most Hated Man on the Internet,” *Rolling Stone*, posted November 13, 2012,

<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/the-most-hated-man-on-the-internet-20121113>.

456 Fidel Martinez, “Anonymous hacks HunterMoore.TV, doxes Moore again,” *The Daily Dot*, posted December 6, 2012,

<http://www.dailydot.com/news/hunter-moore-tv-hacked-anonymous-dox/>.

457 Caroline Contillo, “#OpSafeWinter: Generosity Goes Viral,” *The Interdependence Project*, posted December 30, 2013,

<http://www.theidproject.org/blog/caroline-contillo/2013/12/30/opsafewinter-generosity-goes-viral>.

458 Eduard Kovacs, “OpKillingBay: Anonymous Disrupts Website of Japan’s Wakayama Prefecture,” *Softpedia*, posted January 21, 2014,

<http://news.softpedia.com/news/OpKillingBay-Anonymous-Disrupts-Website-of-Japan-s-Wakayama-Prefecture-419270.shtml>.

459 “Anonymous threaten cyberattack on Albuquerque Police Department for shooting and killing homeless man,” *Hackread*, posted March 28, 2014,

<http://hackread.com/anonymous-threatens-cyber-attack-albuquerque-pd/>.

wider public attention and relying on the subsequent public fallout to bolster their image and reputation. 'more a messenger than a shooter'<sup>460</sup>.

Throughout 2014 and into 2015 Anonymous were provided with a succession of similarly emotive and socially political situations to rebuild their position as a resistance brand. The shooting of black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, St Louis in August 2014 sparked waves of violent protests by the town's predominantly black population. Anonymous threatened the Ferguson Police Department: 'If you abuse, harass or harm the protesters in Ferguson we will take every Web-based asset of your departments and federal agencies offline'<sup>461</sup>. These threats were acted upon as the protests continued and the police arrested journalists on the scene<sup>462</sup>. Anonymous shut down the communications systems at Ferguson City Hall and released personal information about the Mayor of Ferguson's family<sup>463</sup>. The shooting of Tamir Rice in the same month prompted another intrusive doxxing of the police officer responsible<sup>464</sup>.

In January 2015 ISIS-affiliated gunmen opened fire on the offices of French political magazine Charlie Hebdo. Anonymous-authored press releases had suggested targeting ISIS before however the Charlie Hebdo shooting provided Anonymous with the perfect target. The course of Anonymous' 'war' with ISIS, as well as their long term yet low-key campaign against the KKK<sup>465</sup> will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8 as part of a broader assessment of Anonymous' operational capabilities, their future potential and how public opinion of Anonymous has changed in turn. In July 2016 the Turkish government arrested or sacked thousands of soldiers, judges, journalists civil servants and university lecturers

460 Captain, "The Real Role of Anonymous In Occupy Wall Street," *Fast Company*.

461 David Hunn, "How computer hackers changed the Ferguson protests," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, posted August 13, 2014, [http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/how-computer-hackers-changed-the-ferguson-protests/article\\_d81a1da4-ae04-5261-9064-e4c255111c94.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/how-computer-hackers-changed-the-ferguson-protests/article_d81a1da4-ae04-5261-9064-e4c255111c94.html).

462 Jack Mirkinson, "Police Threaten To Shoot, Mace Reporters In Ferguson," *The Huffington Post*, last modified August 18, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/17/police-threaten-reporters-ferguson\\_n\\_5686674.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/17/police-threaten-reporters-ferguson_n_5686674.html).

463 Hunn, "How computer hackers changed the Ferguson protests," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

464 Ryllie Danylko, "Anonymous begins looking into past of Timothy Loehmann, cop who fatally shot Tamir Rice," *Cleveland*, last modified November 27, 2014, [http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2014/11/anonymous\\_begins\\_looking\\_into.html](http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2014/11/anonymous_begins_looking_into.html).

465 Ryan Grenoble, "Anonymous Begins Revealing Information About Alleged Ku Klux Klan Members," *The Huffington Post*, last modified November 2, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/anonymous-reveals-kkk-members-info\\_us\\_56378176e4b063179912f5a4](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/anonymous-reveals-kkk-members-info_us_56378176e4b063179912f5a4).

allegedly connected to a failed military coup<sup>466</sup>. Anonymous also launched Operation Turkey in response to the coup and to the publishing of 300,000 Turkish government emails by Wikileaks<sup>467</sup>:



### OpTurkey

Recent events show the suppression of education and the media in Turkey, these practices are undemocratic and give us the idea the citizens in Turkey are being indoctrinated. Yes, Erdogan was democratically elected but democratic values go beyond the electoral system. Opposition should always have a voice and the free flow of information should be encouraged. WikiLeaks has sustained DDoS attacks after announcing they will release internal e-mails of the Turkish government, and we suspect the Turkish government will try to censor any information they will release.

We ask of the people in Turkey to take interest in the material WikiLeaks is about to release and to not dismiss it because a leader tells them to dismiss it. We advocate the use of anti-censorship tools such as Tor and VPN.

We will do our best to translate the 300 thousand e-mails and 500 thousand documents for the international community to consume and to provide a better understanding of the ongoing situation in Turkey.

Anonymous have a history of involving themselves in events in Turkey before; attacking government and bank websites in June 2011 to protest the government's implementation of internet filtering<sup>468</sup> and in December 2015 to protest the Turkish government's alleged support of ISIS<sup>469</sup>. In response to the post-coup crackdown Anonymous released customer

466 Ece Toksabay, Samia Nakhoul and Nick Tattershall, "Erdogan announces army overhaul in latest post-coup shakeup," *Reuters*, posted July 23, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-idUSKCN0ZX07S>.

467 Anonymous (@LatestAnonNews), Twitter post, July 20, 2016, 5:00p.m., <https://twitter.com/LatestAnonNews/status/755794534118723585>.

468 Stan Schroeder, "Hackers Protest Censorship by Taking Down a Government Website in Turkey," *Mashable*, posted June 10, 2011, <http://mashable.com/2011/06/10/anonymous-turkey/#5aIRfra0saq5>.

469 Vasudevan Sridharan, "Anonymous: Turkey reeling under cyberattack as government and bank websites paralysed," *International Business Times*, posted December 26, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/anonymous-turkey-reeling-under-cyber-attack-government-banks-sites-paralysed-1534984>.



information, maintenance reports and budget documents from Turkish energy company Izmir Gaz in the same month<sup>470</sup>.

Anonymous' cellular nature means that the conduct of operations by Anonymous-identifying groups in their respective countries around the world were largely unaffected by the fall of LulzSec. In 2013 Anonymous Taiwan attacked Philippine government websites over the suspicious deaths of Taiwanese fishermen<sup>471</sup>. In 2014 LulzSec Peru (related in name only) exposed the extent of the oil and fishing industries' influence on the Peruvian Council of Ministers. This information was a contributory factor to a public outcry and vote of no confidence which was only one vote away from forcing the dissolution of the entire cabinet<sup>472</sup>. In 2015 Anonymous Taiwan attacked Taiwanese government websites as part of protests against a China-centric school curriculum<sup>473</sup>. In 2016 Anonymous South Africa attacked South African government websites over child labour issues and internet censorship<sup>474</sup>. In the same year Portuguese Anons attacked the websites of the Angolan government for jailing protesters<sup>475</sup>.

470 Caitlin Cimpanu, "Anonymous Dumps Database of Izmir Gaz to Protest Against Turkey and Erdogan," *Softpedia*, posted July 22, 2016, <http://news.softpedia.com/news/anonymous-dumps-database-of-izmir-gaz-to-protest-against-turkey-and-erdogan-506540.shtml>.

471 "Anonymous Taiwan takes down multiple Philippines Govt. Websites and Leaked Confidential data online; We will not Stop Anonymous said," *Hacker News Bulletin*, posted March 2013, <http://www.hackersnewsbulletin.com/2013/05/anonymous-taiwan-takes-down-multiple-philippines-govt-websites-and-leaked-confidential-data-online-we-will-not-stop-anonymous-said.html>.

472 Frank Bajak, "Top South America hackers rattle Peru's Cabinet," *AP: The Big Story*, posted September 2, 2014, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/top-south-america-hackers-rattle-perus-cabinet>.

473 "Anonymous Attacks Taiwan, Shuts Down Government Websites," *AnonHQ*, posted August 3, 2015, <http://anonhq.com/anonymous-attacks-taiwan-shuts-down-government-websites/>.

474 Jan Vermeulen, "Massive number of South African websites hacked by Anonymous," *MyBroadband*, posted February 12, 2016, <http://mybroadband.co.za/news/security/155040-massive-number-of-south-african-websites-hacked-by-anonymous.html>.

475 "Anonymous hacks Angolan government after activists jailed," *The Guardian*, posted March 31, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/31/anonymous-hacks-angolan-government-after-activists-jailed>.

### Anonymous and beyond – the Syrian Electronic Army, Lizard Squad and the Fancy Bears

Anonymous' dynamic tactical template for guerrilla online politics has brought them the attention of the wider world and made its symbols a ubiquitous language for indignant protest causes around the world. Since the downturn of direct confrontation compared to their the peaks of strategic and tactical hubris between 2011-2012 Anonymous' methods have been picked up and/or expanded upon by groups outside their international mirror groups as discussed above. This section will look at the Syrian Electronic Army, a group who have made use of Anonymous' tools and tactics for different purposes and Lizard Squad, a group of hackers who attempted to imitate Anonymous more directly.

The Syrian Electronic Army is a group of pro-Assad government hackers who have been active since 2011<sup>476</sup>. The SEA has links to the Syrian Computer Society, an organisation set up by current Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's brother Bassel Al-Assad in 1989<sup>477</sup>. The SCS is solely responsible providing websites with the .sy address<sup>478</sup>. The operations launched by the SEA have a lot in common with Anonymous' own tactical template; defacing websites of western news agencies critical of the Syrian government<sup>479</sup>, disrupting online media services<sup>480</sup> and hijacking Twitter accounts. It is important to remember that Anonymous did not invent these techniques but they were used as part of deliberately visible and verbose operational template which showed they were viable for causing serious disruption to spread a particular message. In 2013 The SEA demonstrated this through an operation reminiscent of the LulzSec's defacing of News Corp publication websites with false stories about the death of Rupert Murdoch<sup>481</sup> that also eclipsed Anonymous' real-world impact to date. On April 23

476 Sarah Fowler, "Who is the Syrian Electronic Army?," *BBC News*, posted April 25, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22287326>.

477 Helmi Noman, "The Emergence of Open and Organized Pro-Government Cyber Attacks in the Middle East: The Case of the Syrian Electronic Army," *OpenNet Initiative*, accessed March 23, 2015, <https://opennet.net/emergence-open-and-organized-pro-government-cyber-attacks-middle-east-case-syrian-electronic-army>.

478 Sean Gallagher, "Network Solutions seizes over 700 domains registered to Syrians," *ArsTechnica*, posted May 8, 2013, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2013/05/network-solutions-seized-over-700-domains-registered-to-syrians/>

479 Eduard Kovacs, "Forbes Hacked by Syrian Electronic Army," *Softpedia*, posted February 14, 2014, <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Forbes-Hacked-by-Syrian-Electronic-Army-426797.shtml>.

480 Lianna Brinded, "Syrian Electronic Army Causes Internet Chaos By Shutting Down Media Outlets via Giga Platform Hack," *International Business Times*, posted November 27, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/syrian-electronic-army-causes-internet-chaos-by-shutting-down-media-outlets-1476948>.

481 Andy Greenberg, "LulzSec Hackers Deface The Sun Newspaper To Declare Rupert Murdoch Dead, Claim Stolen Emails," *Forbes*, posted July 18, 2011,

2013 the SEA gained access to the Twitter account of the Associated Press and releases a statement on Twitter that there had been an explosion at the White House and that President Barack Obama had been injured<sup>482</sup>:



As a result of this message the Dow Jones stock exchange lost \$136 billion dollars three minutes<sup>483</sup>:

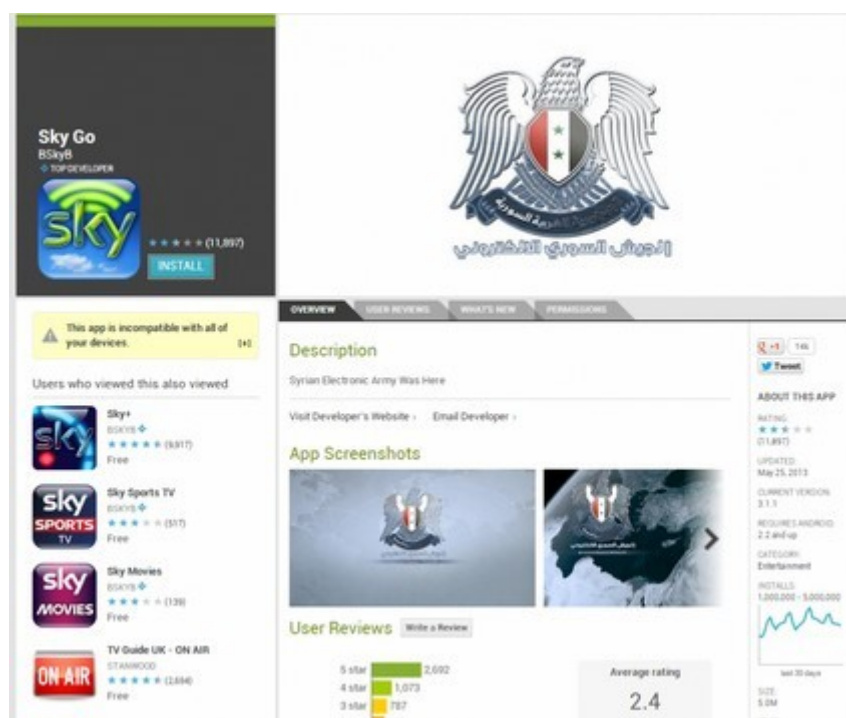


<http://www.forbes.com/sites/andygreenberg/2011/07/18/anonymous-hackers-hack-the-sun-newspaper-to-declare-murdoch-dead-claim-stolen-emails/#2c2339324733>.

482 Peter Foster, “‘Bogus’ AP tweet about explosion at the White House wipes billions off US markets,” *The Telegraph*, posted April 23, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/markets/10013768/Bogus-AP-tweet-about-explosion-at-the-White-House-wipes-billions-off-US-markets.html>.

483 Ibid.

As with Anonymous' operations, the effects of this were short-lived. The stock market quickly recovered once the claims were proven to be false and ownership of the Associated Press' Twitter account had been restored within the hour. The following month the SEA hacked into Google's app store, placing pro-Assad messages and symbols onto BskyB's Sky Go app<sup>484</sup>:



These attacks formed part of a wider campaign by the SEA against popular online services such as Paypal and eBay<sup>485</sup>. In November 2014 the SEA exploited a security vulnerability in Gigya, a system used by high-traffic news sites such as Forbes, The Telegraph and CNN, as well as companies like Microsoft, Ferrari and Michael Kors<sup>486</sup> to organise and manage their social media integration and comment sections<sup>487</sup>. Visitors to these affected sites saw a

484 "BskyB Google Play Store Apps Hacked by Syrian Electronic Army," *International Business Times*, posted May 27, 2013,

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/google-play-store-bskyb-apps-hacked-syrian-471601>.

485 Dave Neal, "Syrian Electronic Army hacks Paypal and eBay websites," *The Inquirer*, posted February 3, 2014, <http://www.theinquirer.net/inquirer/news/2326417/syrian-electronic-army-hacks-paypal-and-ebay-websites>.

486 Brandon Stosh, "Syrian Electronic Army Hacks Forbes, Ferrari, Daily Telegraph, Independent, Intel Among Hundreds of others," *Freedom Hacker*, posted November 27, 2014, <https://freedomhacker.net/syrian-electronic-army-hacks-ferrari-forbes-daily-telegraph-independent-intel-and-more-3473/>.

487 Katrina Bishop and Arjun Kharpal, "Global websites hacked by Syrian Electronic Army," *CNBC*, posted November 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/27/global-websites-hacked-by-syrian-electronic-army.html>

message appear on their screen which said 'You've been hacked by the Syrian Electronic Army (SEA)'. None of these attacks caused serious disruption or had any long-term impact, however this was not their intended outcome. Defacing or hijacking the Twitter account of the Microsoft Xbox games console technical support team<sup>488</sup> may seem unimportant and a waste of time, however this is not the case. As with Anonymous, the point of such attacks is to generate stories, media coverage and exposure. The SEA tailored their strategy to generate the most media coverage and distribution through social media. This approach was more effective than attacking security companies or obscure government sub-departments who the majority of the population don't know or care about. By focusing on popular targets whose disruption would generate a feedback loop of social media attention the SEA were able to raise awareness of the conflict in Syria and, more importantly, illustrate how vulnerable the online systems which we place our trust and personal data into on a constant and daily basis are.

One of the first notable examples of an Anonymous copycat group appeared in August 2014. Calling themselves 'Lizard Squad', complete with a LulzSec-like logo of an iguana wearing a top hat and monocle, they announced a campaign of DDOS attacks against video game companies and their online infrastructure<sup>489</sup>:



488 Ravi Mandalia, "SEA hijacks official Xbox Support Twitter account," *Techie News*, posted January 11, 2014, <http://www.techienews.co.uk/974686/sea-hijacks-official-xbox-support-twitter-account/>.

489 Thomas Fox-Brewster, "Vigilante Hackers Fight Lizard Squad For Control Of 150,000 Home Routers," *Forbes*, posted February 9, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2016/02/09/vigilantes-want-lizard-squad-out-of-your-home/>.

This widespread and seemingly random campaign against one of the biggest entertainment industries in the world was punctuated by actions affecting the real world such as reporting a bomb aboard a flight taken by a Sony executive<sup>490</sup> as well as continuing to attack online gaming services such as Microsoft's Xbox Live and Sony's PlayStation Network over the 2014<sup>491</sup> and popular online games like Destiny and League of Legends over the Christmas holiday period. A Lizard Squad member gave numerous anonymous interviews to major news outlets offering an explanation for their actions:

...one of the big aspects here was raising awareness regarding the low state of computer security at these companies. Because these companies make tens of millions every month from subscriber fees and that doesn't even include purchases made by their customers. They should have more than enough funding to be able to protect against these attacks. And if they can't protect against the attacks on their core business networks then I don't think they're really doing that much on their overall level of security. And these customers are still giving these companies their credit card numbers and such<sup>492</sup>.

Lizard Squad's attacks often included deliberately provocative statements such as claiming to 'plant the flag of ISIS on Sony's servers'<sup>493</sup> and replacing the main page of the Malaysia Airlines with text stating the site was 'Hacked by Lizard Squad – Official Cyber Caliphate'<sup>494</sup>:

490 Paul Tassi, "Hackers Ground Sony Executive's Flight With Bomb-Threat Tweet," *Forbes*, posted August 24, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2014/08/24/sony-online-entertainment-presidents-flight-diverted-by-psn-hackers-bomb-threat/#ca68c9355de9>.

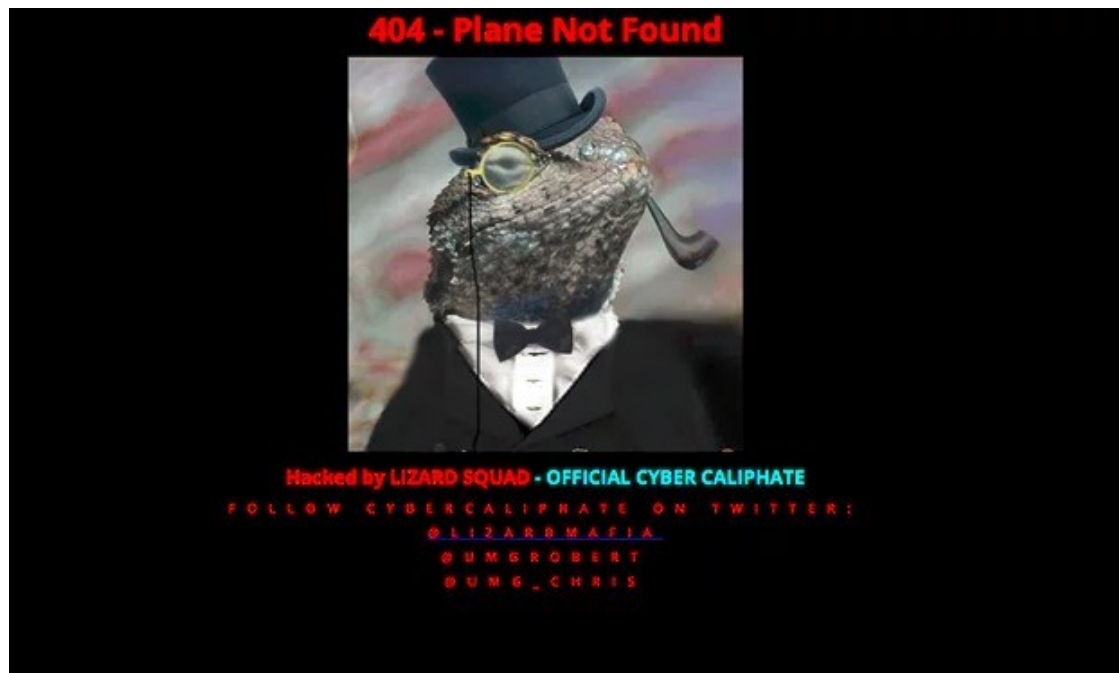
491 Kate Knibbs, "Hackers Who Shut Down PSN and Xbox Live Now Attacking Tor," *Gizmodo*, posted December 26, 2014, <http://gizmodo.com/hackers-who-shut-down-psn-and-xbox-live-now-attacking-t-1675331908>.

492 Joe Tidy, "Xbox 'Hacker' Reveals Why He Attacked Consoles," *Sky News*, posted July 4, 2016, <http://news.sky.com/story/1398435/xbox-hacker-reveals-why-he-attacked-consoles>.

493 David Gilbert, "Who are Lizard Squad? The hackers who took down PSN, Xbox Live and Facebook," *International Business Times*, posted August 26, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/who-are-lizard-squad-isis-linked-hackers-trolls-making-bomb-threats-1462639>.

494 Alyssa Newcomb, "Malaysia Airlines Hit by Lizard Squad Hack Attack," *ABC News*, posted January 26, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/malaysia-airlines-hit-lizard-squad-hack-attack/story?id=28489244>.





Lizard Squad had no affiliation with ISIS whatsoever. This was an example of the kind of expertly-crafted trolling Anonymous had originally built their reputation on. Lizard Squad created a gang of vociferous ISIS hackers who were attacking video game companies' online infrastructure to ruin Christmas; a story so ludicrous yet irresistible it was guaranteed to generate alarmist media coverage which echoed across social media platforms for a long time<sup>495</sup>. However cynically Lizard Squad perpetuated their ISIS hacker story, the arrests of young men in Canada, the UK and Finland by the middle of 2015 exposed the truth. As well as multiple charges of fraud and harassment<sup>496</sup> one of Lizard Squad, Julius Kivimaki, was convicted of over 50,000 counts of computer crime<sup>497</sup>.

Lizard Squad made all the same moves as Anonymous; creating distinct iconography, launching DDOS attacks, giving interviews and trolling their targets and the media to stay in the media spotlight. However they were 6 years too late. The internet of 2014/2015 was a markedly different place than the internet of 2008. The cautionary tale of LulzSec and the years in between had reduced wider enthusiasm for belligerent hacker crew superstars.

495 "Cyber Caliphate: ISIS Plays Offense on the Web," *Recorded Future*, posted April 2, 2015, <https://www.recordedfuture.com/cyber-caliphate-analysis/>.

496 "Lizard Squad member pleads guilty over 23 counts related to 'swatting'," *The Guardian*, posted May 22, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/may/22/lizard-squad-canadian-pleads-guilty-over-23-counts-related-to-swatting>.

497 Aaron Sankin and William Turton, "How to destroy an American Family," *The Daily Dot*, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://specialreports.dailydot.com/how-to-destroy-an-american-family>.

Mainstream news sources were no longer interested in reporting on the idiosyncratic actions of hacker groups like Anonymous or Lizard Squad; any operation had to be truly spectacular to beat coverage of ISIS or Edward Snowden. Anything less was relegated to the relatively niche internet/technology news sphere. During their brief lifespan Lizard Squad even engaged in direct confrontation with Anonymous after attempting to compromise the anonymity of the Tor network<sup>498</sup>.

While groups like Lizard Squad fashioned themselves as Anonymous analogues through using similar language and visual style, another group has directly referenced Anonymous in their outward-facing materials. Claiming to stand for ‘...fair play and clean sport’<sup>499</sup> the ‘Fancy Bears’ hacking team makes direct reference to Anonymous’ language and imagery<sup>500</sup>:



This page is full of direct visual and linguistic references to Anonymous, from the background symbol of the headless suited figure and the polar bear wearing a Guy Fawkes mask to the use of Anonymous by name, #OpOlympics and ‘We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us.’ Fancy Bears activities to date have been entirely

498 Quentin Plummer, “Tor Attack Pits Anonymous Against Lizard Squad: PSN and Xbox Live Back Online,” *Tech Times*, posted January 1, 2015,

<http://www.techtimes.com/articles/23334/20150101/tor-attack-pits-anonymous-against-lizard-squad-psn-and-xbox-live-recovering.htm>.

499 “Fancy Bears Hack Team,” *Fancybear.net*, accessed September 19, 2016  
[www.fancybear.net](http://www.fancybear.net).

500 Ibid.

focused on hacking the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and sharing the drug records of gold medal-winning athletes from the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and recent winners of the Tour de France<sup>501</sup>. Some of these revelations sound salacious when taken out of context; for example according to the leaked documents the WADA gave Serena and Venus Williams, Chris Froome and Bradley Wiggins permission to take banned substances. Upon closer examination these athletes held specific TUEs; ‘therapeutic use exemptions’ which provide permission to take medication which contains banned substances if there is no alternative product available<sup>502</sup>.

The exact origin or purpose of the Fancy Bears is unclear. If we follow the underlying logic of Anonymous through, that by declaring themselves as Anonymous there are as much an ‘Anon’ as the masked protesters outside Scientology buildings in 2008, LulzSec or anyone else. Anonymous have a history of exposing the corruption and duplicity of large organisations, however there have never been any operations against WADA or which coincide with the 4 Olympic Games that have taken place during Anonymous’ 8-year history. According to Adam Meyers, the Vice President of computer intelligence and defence company CrowdStrike, Fancy Bears are a Russian hacker group who are as old as Anonymous themselves and are involved with another group called Cozy Bears, claiming that

This is something that the Russian Government would want, some kind of inside knowledge, and the way that they get that kind of knowledge is through conducting intrusions – anything that fits within the Russian Government's priorities and its intelligence requirements would be fair game<sup>503</sup>.

Given the controversial disqualification of several Russian athletes prior to the Rio Olympic Games, the timeliness and target of this attack makes sense as both a reprisal and an information-gathering operation. It is possible that Fancy Bears are using the language and imagery of Anonymous in the same way Lizard Squad used language similar to ISIS. Invoking either of them in combination is a relatively easy way to generate news headlines

501 Tracey Holmes, “Fancy Bears hacking group has ties to Russian presidency, US cyber security experts say,” *ABC News Australia*, last modified September 17, 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-17/fancy-bear-has-ties-to-russian-presidency-cyber-expert-says/7854658>.

502 Sean Ingle, “Russian hackers expected to leak names of another 48 British Olympians with TUEs,” *The Guardian*, posted September 16, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/sep/15/fancy-bears-leak-british-olympians-48-tues>.

503 Tracey Holmes, “Fancy Bears hacking group has ties to Russian presidency, US cyber security experts say,” *ABC News Australia*.

and social media buzz. In both of these cases it worked; as discussed above Lizard Squad's use of terms like 'cyber caliphate' made their otherwise uninteresting attacks into major stories with debates over this Anonymous/ISIS hybrid echoing across social media and news comments sections for days afterwards. Fancy Bears' use of Anonymous' name, language and symbolism has had the same effect; drawing attention to an operation whose timing and political context was more important than what it actually did. This use of Anonymous as a lightning-rod controversy has met with mixed success. At least one technology media outlet has directly referred to Fancy Bears as part of Anonymous in their headlines and coverage<sup>504</sup> while others have described them as 'Russian hackers using the name Fancy Bears and posing as an offshoot of the Anonymous hacker collective' and criticising their actions as 'useless'<sup>505</sup>. By wearing Anonymous' face and mimicking their movements both these groups have baited journalists into doing most of their promotion work for them, generating wider political controversy and discussions which echo around the social media space.

### Conclusion

This chapter has explored the third epoch of Anonymous' history; a period of outright and noticeably lulz-free aggression which had not been seen before. This escalation of Anonymous' activity in this period was driven by a succession of dramatic and politically tumultuous world events whose timing worked in Anonymous' favour. The political and social turmoil of the 2010-2011 period provided the stimulus Anonymous needed through a succession of causes which the Anonymous identity could be attached to. It was out of this period of overlapping operations that LulzSec came together, bringing back the lulz and showing that it was possible for Anonymous to operate autonomously without a prescribed enemy. Unfortunately for LulzSec and Anonymous this unchecked acceleration of operational capacity and hubris over their own invincibility meant that their collective reach had exceeded their grasp.

504 Waqas Amir, "Anonymous 'Fancy Bears' Hack World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Again," *Hackread*, posted September 13, 2016, <https://www.hackread.com/anonymous-fancy-bears-hack-wada-again/>.

505 Catalin Cimpanu, "Fancy Bears Hackers Leak Another Batch of Useless WADA Files," *Softpedia*, posted September 15, 2016, <http://news.softpedia.com/news/fancy-bears-hackers-leak-another-batch-of-useless-wada-files-508351.shtml>.

The saga of LulzSec is one of the pivotal moments in Anonymous' history. Anons had been arrested before but this was the first high-profile example of a cell being undermined by an informant to such a complete degree. The decentralised and tautological nature of Anonymous limited the organisational impact; LulzSec were well-known, but were still one group among many of otherwise disconnected sub-communities. Anonymous responded by switching from open, transgressive operations against western target in favour of causes which are morally justifiable, unlikely to result in prosecution or acting as force multipliers for existing protests. In this case Anonymous' flexibility and lack of hierarchical structure contributed to their survival. The Anonymous identity is inherently malleable and completely open to interpretation. Anonymous was forced to reinvent itself to survive, even if that survival is as a relative shadow of its former self; mirrored through groups like the Syrian Electronic Army and Lizard Squad using similar tactics and aesthetics for their own ends.

The fall of LulzSec showed that Anonymous were not invincible, as this chapter has briefly alluded to. The next chapter will expand on this by looking at the state response to Anonymous on individual, national and international levels; the details of charges brought against individual Anons, the changing physical police response to the Million Mask Marches in London from 2012-2015 and how Anonymous have been considered by international bodies like NATO. This wider contemporary analysis of the interplay between Anonymous and authority will be expanded through a return to the themes of chapter 3; determining what we can learn from history to further our understanding of such a complex and pluralistic phenomenon as Anonymous.

## Chapter Seven – The Other Side of the Mask

2010-2011 was the apex of Anonymous' operational capability, effectiveness and possibly relevance to date. It was the result of 3 years of snowballing and often overlapping campaigns against an expanding portfolio of enemies which included financial institutions, governments and security services across the world. This peak of this aggressive activism was the 50-day hacking spree by LulzSec, a small group within Anonymous whose rampage across the internet was undermined by an informant from the start. The judicial consequences for LulzSec and other arrested Anons have already been mentioned in the previous chapter. This chapter will also build on the themes of chapter 3 by re-examining the broader historical contextual relationship between non-state actors and communications technology; this time looking at examples of other 'real' revolutionary groups, the definitional framework which categorises them and their activities and where Anonymous can be placed relative to them. This chapter will look in more detail at the charges brought against LulzSec and other prominent Anons as part of a discussion of the wider response to Anonymous by states and security services around the world. This will range from considering the arrests and prosecution of individuals and small groups such as LulzSec/Sabu and Jeremy Hammond up to larger-scale policy decisions and directions by both individual governments and INGOs.

### The long tail of communications technologies as a political tool

Radical political movements exhibit characteristics which mirror the socio-political trends of the societies in which they develop. Mao adapted and changed Russian Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory to fit the socio-political reality of a largely rural/agricultural 1920s China. To this end he utilised the revolutionary potential of the misery and poverty of rural communities to supplant the government with his own parallel systems. Instead of focussing on creating an insurgent urban proletariat as per the Russian/Soviet model, Mao achieved this through politicising the small issues of the otherwise ignored peasant class<sup>506</sup>. This process of cultural replication within a political movement extends to the communication environment and available technologies, providing outlets for propaganda, recruitment and connecting with other groups who share the same ideals. By the 1980s satellite television stations started reporting news from around the world in almost real-time<sup>507</sup>. This reduction in the time delay

506 John Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago* (India: Hurst and Company, 2012), 22.

507 Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2002), 255.



between events and their reproduction as news reports for audiences was co-opted as a means of political communication by groups who did not have access to such channels through conventional means.

Palestinian militant groups constructed media spectacles to capitalise on this acceleration. In 1970 multiple passenger planes were brought to Dawson's Field, an airstrip in Jordan, demanding the release of Israeli-held prisoners in exchange for their hostages. This seven-day spectacle of press conferences, negotiations and empty planes being pre-emptively destroyed to mitigate any rescue attempts was broadcast live around the world. In 1972 the Palestinian group Black September took 11 Israeli athletes hostage at the Munich Olympic Games, making similar demands for the release of Israeli-held prisoners. The dramatic negotiations, planned rescue attempts and the climactic airport gun battle played out live on television sets around the world; a feat that would have been impossible for the hijackers to achieve by themselves at the time. These groups understood that television was a popular entertainment medium driven by the creation of spectacle or theatre in a fast-paced and highly competitive environment; getting a message to the audience first was more important than that message being 'right'. In both cases the kidnappers provided news television channels with exactly what they wanted to show and exactly what their audiences wanted to see.

This use of television as a political tool enabled Palestinian militant groups to shift the struggle of the Palestinian people from the kinetic to the cognitive level, creating a new intangible battle-space through snowballing media attention to compensate for the lack of a 'real' one<sup>508</sup>. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century this process of diverting the insatiable appetite of the media for political purposes had been counterbalanced by the accessibility and availability of the internet. Individuals and groups can communicate with each other and their potential audiences through a technological platform that bypasses the prior need for television stations and newspapers as gatekeepers<sup>509</sup>. Anonymous have primarily operated through the internet their entire lives, however there have been examples of Anons making use of television as a willing participant, in some cases doing both at the same. In 2011 Anonymous targeted the Westboro Baptist Church for their open homophobia and protesting at the funerals of military

508 Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago*, 130.

509 Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 15.

personnel during a live interview with representatives of the Westboro Church and Anonymous; the latter eventually revealed as Jake Davis a.k.a. 'Topiary', one of the most active members of LulzSec<sup>510</sup>, hacked the Church's website live on air during the interview<sup>511</sup>. Anonymous have subverted the internet for their own unique form of political activism, spreading messages with less effort and expense than setting up their own equivalent communications platforms. Provocative attacks such as the 2006 Habbo Hotel raid undermined the legitimacy of the site's administrators, publicly embarrassing them over rumours of racial profiling and prejudice<sup>512</sup>. Social networks live and die on their reputation as populous and secure hubs of human interaction. For sites aimed at teenagers and young people network like Habbo this image is fundamental to its reputation and survival<sup>513</sup>. Had the Habbo staff taken less extreme action to counter the Streisand Effect instigated by the raiders then the incident would have been forgotten as a simple case of trolls being trolls. The harassment of Hal Turner by proto-Anonymous later the same year over his right-wing radio show was a display of similar tactics. Turner tried to sue the owners of 4chan for harassment and libel. This was a tactic he had used before to defend himself from his detractors. In this case 4chan was not responsible for the off-site activities of its users, who had retreated back into the anonymity of the internet. After a year of no action from Turner the case was dropped<sup>514</sup>.

These examples may seem like acts of puerile aggression by a group of people so detached from real life that they don't see others online as real people. However such cases highlight something important which can be overlooked or belittled in comparison to the actions of 'real' political activists or the sweeping forces of history which re frame the meaning and memory of events after the fact. Whether looking at Anonymous specifically or other radical political groups it is important to consider the motivations of those involved. The actions of

510 Olivia Solon, "Jake Davis, AKA 'Topiary', on being arrested and banned from the internet, Wired 2013 video," *Wired*, posted October 18, 2013, <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/jake-davis-topiary>.

511 David Pakman Show, "Anonymous Hacks Westboro Baptist Church Website LIVE," YouTube video, 10:26, posted February 24, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZJwSjor4hM>.

512 "Pool's Closed," *Know Your Meme*, last modified February 20, 2015, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pools-closed/>.

513 "What is happening in Habbo Hotel?" *Channel 4 News*, posted August 14, 2012, <http://www.channel4.com/news/what-is-happening-in-habbo-hotel>.

514 Cole Stryker, *Epic Win For Anonymous: How 4chan's Army Conquered the Web* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2011), 232.

insurgents, terrorists, revolutionaries or whichever term of collective identification fits are the sparks from the aspirational goals of angry young people collide with the uncomfortable truths of their socio-economic reality; a process in which Anonymous is no exception.

The disappointment from this mismatch of ideals versus reality can be channelled into behaviours ranging from delinquent/criminal activity and simple civil disobedience to more radical anti-authoritarian beliefs. A historical example of this process was the emergence of the Red Army Faction in West Germany in the 1970s. The RAF was a response to such a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement. A generation perceived themselves as living with and paying for the sins of their fathers, a position which was reinforced by the failure of denazification visible through the high numbers of former Nazis working in positions of political or economic power. Yasser Arafat was 20 when he began smuggling weapons into the Mandate of Palestine<sup>515</sup>. Mao was barely out of his teens when he became involved in protests against the Chinese government's weak response to Japanese expansion<sup>516</sup>. Regardless of their retrospective framing as fulcrums of history, these were angry young men (and in the case of the Red Army Faction, women) whose aspirations were at odds with the boundaries of their respective realities; a sentiment which runs throughout Anonymous' outward-facing materials and sits at the core of the Anonymous identity.

As seen through operations such as the Habbo Hotel raid, the harassment of Hal Turner and Project Chanology, the natural reaction of Anonymous' targets is a counter-intuitive one. Throughout Anonymous' history, and depending on their size/scale, their targets have responded through a variety of measures. Smaller targets have published press releases and statements of their own which only fuel Anonymous' feedback loop of operational momentum. In the case of LulzSec's spree of hacking against governments and other international organisations the world over, such attacks have contributed to further political and legal justifications for increased surveillance powers, website filtering or covertly launching DDOS attacks against Anonymous in turn<sup>517</sup>. These kinds of reaction are exactly what Anonymous needs to bridge the substantial power gap between themselves and the

515 Dany Rubenstein, *The Mystery of Arafat* (New York: Steerforth Press, 1995), 38.

516 Alexander V. Pantsov and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 68-70.

517 Katie Collins, "Anonymous and LulzSec targeted by GCHQ DDOS attacks," *Wired*, posted February 5, 2014, <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2014-02/05/gchq-ddos-attack-anonymous>.

considerably stronger apparatus of their opponents. As discussed in chapter 3, this kind of robust response can hand the information advantage to the inherently weaker but more dynamic insurgent/revolutionary actor. Returning to the case study of Martin Luther, the Reformation and the Catholic Church, this desire to rebuke the subversive messages of Luther, Tyndale and others risked engaging them in debate and further exposing the discrepancies and hypocrisies in the Church's doctrine to wider public scrutiny. However saying nothing achieves the similar effect, enabling those challenging the status quo to define the truth of the conflict, both for events as they happen as well as framing past events retroactively<sup>518</sup>.

What makes this narrative framing so effective is that it is not reliant on being accurate or necessarily true. It only has believed by enough people to cause a chain reaction of attractive but baseless beliefs whose popularity carves out an alternative reality that serves to perpetuate this advantageous version of events<sup>519</sup>. So where does this place Anonymous?

Like the Electric Telegraph and the printing press before it, the internet has reduced the intellectual and temporal distance between those who use it<sup>520</sup>. As easy as it is to throw emotionally-weighted and subjective terms like 'terrorist' and 'insurgent' around until their meaning becomes diluted to the point of ubiquitous irrelevance<sup>521</sup>, such terms always come back to our interpretation of language and meaning. Traditionally and historically the target of an insurgency has been such analogue and physical states; bureaucracies that maintain and perpetuate their own narrative primacy of their right to the monopoly of the use of force through a series of public yet latent discourses. In the case of Anonymous the hearts and minds of their supporters are far more important than liberation of any kind of physical territory or geography. This is because such an activity for a globally distributed protest group is both impossible and meaningless.

Anonymous operates through a fluid organisational structure which is the antithesis of the typically hierarchical institutions and authorities they often oppose. Their actions undermine

518 Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2002), 81.

519 Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago*, 125.

520 Mackinlay, 137.

521 Ariel Merari, "Terrorism as a strategy of insurgency," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 4 (1993): 214.

the perceived legitimacy of their targets through the weaponisation of communications technologies, purely within the realm of public perception. This can be seen from the Habbo Hotel raids and the actions against Hal Turner through to Operation Payback, Avenge Assange and the HBGary raids; the objective was not to permanently take control of an area but to show that such actions are possible, undermining the legitimacy of those who control or own said area(s) and whose control narrative is built upon projecting the idea that such actions are in fact not possible. Anonymous' strength comes from their ability to evade the physically or structurally violent response from the target or the relevant authorities. This agility is ultimately Anonymous' only defence; there are many examples of when it was not sufficient to escape judicial reciprocity.

### Anonymous and the legal system

An exhaustive and complete list of the charges filed against the Anons who have been arrested over the course of Anonymous' history would be a colossal work in its own right. However there are a number of examples which show the broad character of the legal response to Anonymous and their operations. There were no arrests made in connection to the Habbo Hotel raids or the harassment of Hal Turner in 2006 and any subsequent arrests during 2007 were low-key enough to not be made mention of after the fact. The first Anonymous-associated arrests related to Project Chanology were in May 2008. A 15 year-old boy was arrested for displaying a sign denouncing Scientology as a cult<sup>522</sup>, although he received no significant punishment for this apparent crime. Two notable convictions from Project Chanology were Dmitry Guzner and Brian Thomas Mettenbrink. They were arrested for participating in a denial of service attack which, in the United States carries a penalty of up to 10 years in prison<sup>523</sup> however they were sentenced to a year in prison and given fines of \$37,500 and \$20,000 respectively<sup>524</sup>. We can gain some insight from the legal documentation of their convictions. When asked about his motivations for participating in the Project Chanology DDOS attacks Mettenbrink's motivations tie in to the wider sentiment of the anti-Scientology protests, which in turn represented the collective mindset of the early Anons:

522 "Minor arrested for calling Scientology a "cult"," *Die Welt*, posted May 21, 2008,

<http://www.welt.de/english-news/article2018184/Minor-arrested-for-calling-scientology-a-cult.html>.

523 "Search Warrants Executed in the United States as Part of Ongoing Cyber Investigation," *FBI National Press Releases*, posted January 27, 2011,

[https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/pressrel/press-releases/warrants\\_012711](https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/pressrel/press-releases/warrants_012711).

524 Gary Warner, "Anonymous DDOSers Arrested and Searched," *CyberCrime & Doing Time*, posted January 30, 2011,

<http://garwarner.blogspot.co.uk/2011/01/anonymous-ddosers-arrested-and-searched.html>.

...the COS beliefs are weird and that it was not about they believe[sic] but how they charge people hundreds of dollars to move forward in their religion...Mettenbrink stated that participating in the attack was fun, something new and something interesting to do<sup>525</sup>.

Although much more clinical and a less prescriptive example of the lulz in action, the charges levelled against one of the principle members of LulzSec Jake Davis, aka 'Topiary', is a microcosmic example of how Anonymous' actions are codified by the criminal justice systems. Davis was sentenced to two years<sup>526</sup> in a young offenders institute but only served 38 days as he had worn an electronic tag for 21 months which counted against his sentence<sup>527</sup>.

In 2012 Political activist Jeremy Hammond was arrested for his role in an Anonymous-orchestrated intrusion into the email and payment systems of intelligence/security company Stratfor in 2011. Evidence which justified his arrest was gathered by Hector Monsegur, aka 'Sabu' as part of his role as a mole inside LulzSec, who Hammond worked with at the time. Sabu himself was arrested in 2011 but between this period and his sentencing he had been essentially free. At his sentencing in 2014 he was granted one year of probationary release with the rest of his sentence commuted to time served for his role in assisting the FBI in preventing hundreds of attacks by LulzSec<sup>528</sup>. In stark contrast to Sabu's lenient prosecution Hammond was held for 8 months without trial before being sentenced to ten years in prison in November 2013 for one count of breaching the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA); a term which Hammond himself compared to what Aaron Schwartz was facing for breaching the same act before he killed himself:

They have made it clear they are trying to send a message to others who come after me. A lot of it is because they got slapped around, they were embarrassed by Anonymous and they feel that they need to save face...

I knew when I started out with Anonymous that being put in jail and having a lengthy sentence was a possibility. Given the nature of the targets I was going after I knew I would upset a lot of powerful people.

[Regarding Aaron Schwartz's charges and suicide] The same beast bit us both...They

525 Case 2:09-cr-01149-GAF Document 29-1 p.3 – Mettenbrink sentencing appendix

526 Graham Cluely, "Jake Davis named as a suspected hacker Topiary by UK police," *Naked Security*, posted July 31, 2011,

<https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2011/07/31/jake-davis-named-as-suspected-hacker-topiary-by-uk-police/>.

527 Susan Watts, "Former LulzSec hacker Jake Davis on his motivations," *BBC News*, posted May 16, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-22526021>.

528 Larry Neumeister, "Hacker who helped fed gets no more time in prison," *Yahoo! News*, posted May 27, 2014, <https://news.yahoo.com/hacker-helped-feds-gets-no-more-time-prison-163849732.html>.



went after Aaron because of his involvement in legitimate political causes – they rail-roaded charges against him, and look what happened<sup>529</sup>.

Hammond describes both his own case and the extent of his sentence as political gibbets, an unnerving display to discourage similar actions in the future. His sentence was also a way for the government to save face after getting embarrassed and ‘slapped around’ by Anonymous. The sentences given to Hammond and Schwartz were longer than the 7 year sentence given to Sicilian Mafia boss Domenico Rancadore<sup>530</sup>, the 5 year sentence given to Rolf Harris for 12 charges of indecent assault against young girls<sup>531</sup> and the 8 year sentence for former German policeman Detlev Guenzel who killed and dismembered a man in his basement<sup>532</sup>. Compared to these extensive or deviant crimes the actions of these people the crimes of Hammond and Schwartz seem trivial. Hammond provided a link to materials which had already been leaked online and the journal library JSTOR had dropped their charges against Schwartz for sharing copyrighted journal content. This loading of custodial sentences falls in line with Foucault's analysis of the relationship between institutions of correction and the role as a system to create and manage delinquency as a mechanism for social control. In 'Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison' Foucault examines the development of the French penal system in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, discussing the underlying development of incarceration as a method of social control and managing delinquency. According to Foucault crimes are punished relative to their potential for broader acceptance by the public and their potential for replication by others:

the injury that a crime inflicts upon the social body is the disorder that it introduces into it: the scandal that it gives rise to, the example that it gives, the incitement to repeat it if it is not punished, the possibility of becoming widespread that it bears within it<sup>533</sup>.

Depictions of the above examples of what would normally be considered severe crimes by the culture industry; crime bosses, sex offenders and particularly gruesome murderers, are

529 Ed Pilkington, "Jailed Anonymous hacker Jeremy Hammond: 'My days of hacking are done'," *The Guardian*, posted November 13, 2013,

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/nov/15/jeremy-hammond-anonymous-hacker-sentenced>

530 "Mafia man Domenico Rancadore to be extradited to Italy," *BBC News*, posted February 20, 2015,

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31555353>.

531 "Rolf Harris sentenced – in 45 seconds," *BBC News*, last modified July 4, 2014,

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-28163098>.

532 "Germany 'cannibal' trial: Former policeman is sentenced," *BBC News*, posted April 1, 2015,

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-32146031>.

533 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995), 92.

celebrated in a way which distances them from their real life inspirations, reinforcing the conceit that such actions are permissible only when kept within the safety of fiction. This is visible in the lists of awards and praise for films such as *Goodfellas*<sup>534</sup> and *The Godfather*<sup>535</sup> as well as television series such as *The Sopranos*<sup>536</sup>. Whether real or commodified fiction, such actions do not pose a similar threat to the legitimacy of copyright as an institution of information control and monetisation. The actions of Hammond, Schwartz, LulzSec and Anonymous as a whole are significantly more dangerous for several reasons. Their crimes are easy to replicate due to the minimal physical effort involved and the appealing way that Anonymous has framed such actions as being part of a greater struggle against oppression. The 'victimless' status of the crimes Hammond and Schwartz committed is a corroboratory factor as well. Depending on your perspective on data piracy nothing is technically stolen; rather it is the abstract concept of stealing potential revenue rather than the actual materials themselves. Likewise nobody was physically hurt or molested in the course of either of these cases. Clicking a link or typing in an IP address for a DDOS tool like the LOIC is quick, easy and requires little input from the user, hence the heavy weighting of Hammond and Schwartz's sentences.

This criminalisation of the hacker class is a modern version of the deliberate creation of delinquency as a method of resolving inter-class conflict<sup>537</sup>; a tautological criminal underclass onto whom the evils of society can be poured. The hacker class, whether they be 'hackers' in the legitimate sense of the word or framed in terms of McKenzie Wark's new information class conflict<sup>538</sup>, are demonised as a subset of society either directly associated with the breaking of laws, or around whom a narrative of implicit criminality or illegality is created. Foucault spends much of 'Discipline and Punish' talking about Panopticism; the philosophy of fostering obedience and control over a given population through potential and constant observation. The subject is aware they may be being observed at any given moment but cannot tell one way or the other in a given moment. This principle takes physical and ideological forms as a school of structural design for correctional institutions and is applicable on a wider abstract level.

534 *Goodfellas*, directed by Martin Scorsese, 1990 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1999), DVD.

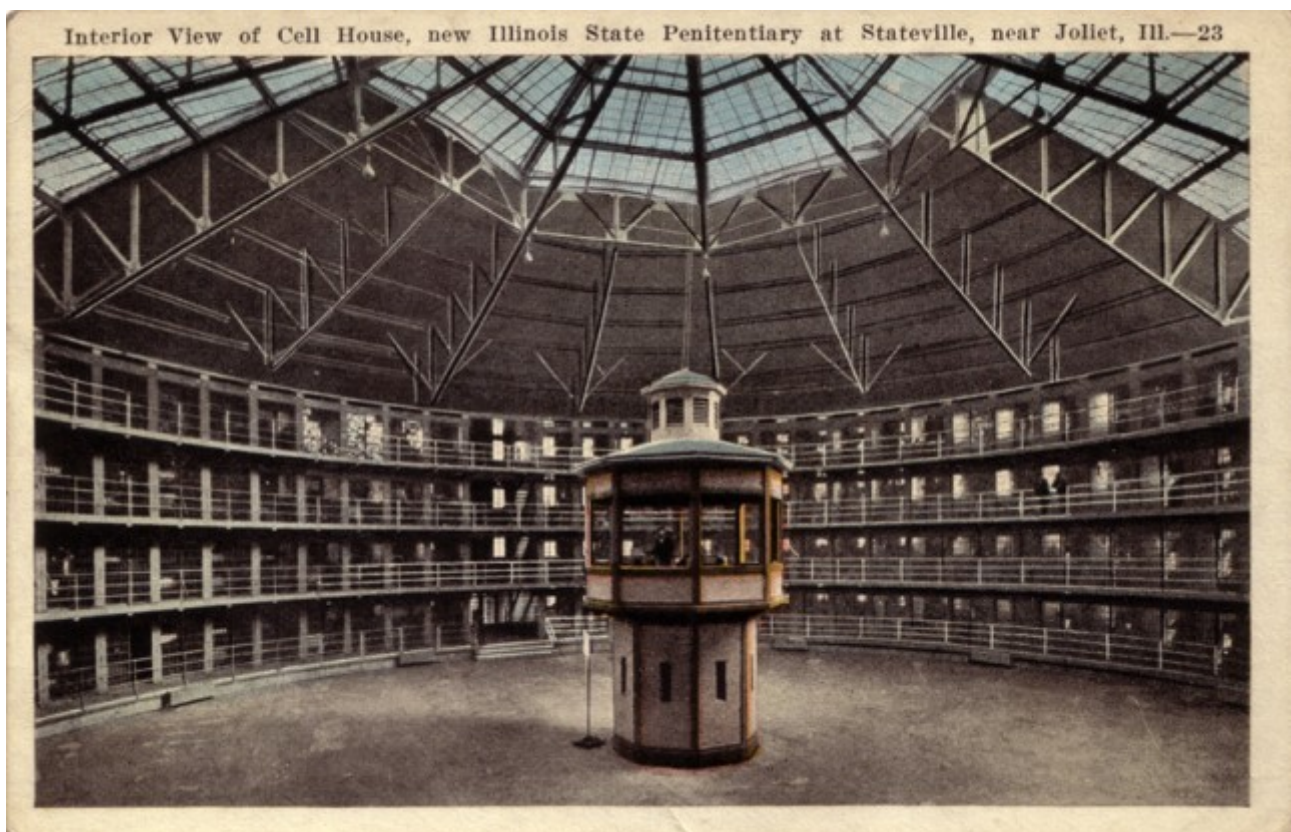
535 *The Godfather*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, 1972 (California: Paramount Pictures, 2013), DVD.

536 *The Sopranos*, directed by Tim Van Patten et al., 1999 (New York: HBO, 2009), DVD.

537 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 275.

538 McKenzie Wark, "A Hacker Manifesto [version 4.0]," in *Anarchitexts: Voices from the Global Digital Resistance*, edited by Joanne Richardson (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century English theorist and philosopher Jeremy Bentham visited his brother in Russia who was managing the industrial enterprises of Prince Grigory Potemkin. During Jeremy's visit Samuel came up with a structure that allowed a small number of foremen and managers to watch a much larger workforce<sup>539</sup>. Jeremy brought the idea back to England and later refined it as a way to potentially overhaul the efficiency of prison buildings<sup>540</sup>. This structure, the Panopticon, is a cylindrical hollow building with the prisoners held in the outer walls. A central tower with small view ports meant that the prisoners could be observed at all times, however they could not see or communicate with each other and did not know when or if they were being observed at all. It was this implied potential for observation that coerced the inmates into obedient behaviour. This structure creates a highly visible, unverifiable and extremely efficient power relationship; maximising the number of observed persons and minimising the number of observers required to maintain it<sup>541</sup>. Below is an example of a Panopticon-like prison to illustrate this functionality<sup>542</sup>:



539 "The Panopticon," *UCL Bentham Project*, accessed November 23, 2015, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project/who/panopticon>.

540 Janet Semple, *Bentham's Prison: a Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 99.

541 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 207.

542 "Internet as Panopticon," *Alliance for Networking Visual Culture*, last modified May 5, 2014, <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/internetandidentity/michael>.

This model of obfuscated surveillance is a relevant analogy to many of the causes Anonymous has responded to throughout their history; the politics of the internet and information, the role of identity in a society of continuous digital visibility and the disparity of power between those in the centre and those on the periphery of society. This can be explored further through some interesting parallels between certain aspects of Bentham's own life and death as an alternative perspective while maintaining thematic links to the overarching analysis of Anonymous. Shortly before his death in 1832, Bentham added in his will that he wished his remains to be preserved and put on display inside a glass case called the 'Auto-Icon':

My body I give to my dear friend Doctor Southwood Smith...he will take my body under his charge and take the requisite and appropriate measures for the disposal and preservation of the several parts of my bodily frame in the manner expressed in the paper annexed to this my will and at the top of which I have written Auto Icon. The skeleton he will cause to be put together in such a manner as that the whole figure may be seated in a chair usually occupied by me when living...He will cause the skeleton to be clad in one of the suits of black occasionally worn by me...he will cause to be prepared an appropriate box or case and will cause to be engraved in conspicuous characters on a plate to be affixed thereon...<sup>543</sup>

To this day his skeleton sits on a chair inside the Auto-Icon which currently resides in the South Cloisters of University College London<sup>544</sup>. Bentham even has a Twitter account, from which a picture taken with a web-cam attached to the Auto-Icon is posted every hour<sup>545</sup>:



543 "Auto Icon," *UCL Bentham Project*, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project/who/autoicon>.

544 Minus the head, which has been replaced with a wax likeness of Bentham instead. The reasons for this are twofold; firstly the preservation process went wrong and secondly the head has been stolen several times.

545 "Panopticom," *UCL*, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/panopticom/>.



We will never know what motivated Jeremy Bentham to arrange for his body to be displayed in such a way. Whatever the reasoning, there are useful parallels between the Auto-Icon, the relationship between the idea of the Panopticon and the internet and concepts of surveillance and the right to privacy relative to Anonymous.

As with the other historical examples this research has drawn on, the metaphor of the Panopticon is relevant to the contextual reality of our 21<sup>st</sup> century communication environment. Instead of thinking of ourselves as prisoners in the walls of a digital Panopticon, we are more like Bentham himself inside the Auto-Icon. The Panopticon is built on the idea that through the uncertainty of observation dissent and resistance can be silenced through the soft structural violence of constant visibility. The Auto-Icon is a deliberate and permanent choice to be on display; a strong relational metaphor in the context of modern mass self-communication. This idea comes up in interviews and documentation from Anonymous again and again; and once again Jake Davis 'Topiary' is useful in this analysis. As part of the launch event for a stage play based on LulzSec in 2014 Davis and the other prominent LulzSec members gave a discussion on their history. During the discussion Davis stated:

...you see a lot of people going online with an ignorance of where their data ends up but also uncaring about data being used by Facebook for a psychological experiment or being sold to the CIA. People have that attitude that if you're not doing anything wrong you have nothing to hide...when you put something online it is there forever<sup>546</sup>.

This phenomenon is what author and CNN columnist Andrew Keen calls the 'crystal prison of the self'<sup>547</sup>, the idea that our self-broadcasting visibility has, through a self-fulfilling, self-sustaining and entirely voluntary action loop become a trap; one that paradoxically isolates us from each other despite the outward appearance of increased connectivity. Throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this sentiment of trapping oneself in a tautological prison of ideology and visibility became a more common theme as the pace of social communication technologies began to accelerate. If this dominant reality is one of essentialising and seducing us into our own Auto-Icons through the shining gates of our own crystal prisons, then it can be seen as a further extension of Guy Debord's construction of modern living through the

546 royalcourtheatre, "The Big Idea: In Conversation with LULZSEC," YouTube video, 44:57, posted September 29, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpGiLPF5BxQ>.

547 Andrew Keen, *#Digital Vertigo: how today's online social revolution is dividing, diminishing, and disorienting us* (London: Constable, 2012), 159.

Society of the Spectacle, '...the locus of illusion and false consciousness...a social relationship between people that is mediated by images'<sup>548</sup>. Debord establishes Keen's concept of tautological shared isolation 40 years earlier, that the modern spectacle is founded on and requires the isolation of the individual<sup>549</sup> through technology that claims on the one hand to offer solutions to the very problems that it creates with the other<sup>550</sup> 'Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very centre that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its separateness'<sup>551</sup>.

Intelligence gathering operations by police and security organisations have been made much easier by such behaviours becoming so commonplace<sup>552</sup>, resulting in gains and losses for Anonymous as a political actor operating in such a digitally panoptic environment. However the mechanisms of self-communication and the lure of the crystal prison of the self are nothing if not pervasive. There are at least two Anonymous Facebook groups with the blue tick icon which Facebook gives to pages who have been verified as whom they claim to be; a badge normally reserved for companies and famous figures. Numerous twitter profiles claim varying degrees of official status where people use their real profiles and names; a corkscrew of irony and meta-identity that softly undermines the ideas and notions of Anonymous:

I cannot help but think of a bible story, a story I will paraphrase here. The story of Jesus and the money lenders and the corruption of Gods word. At this point in history heaven could only be obtained by the devout and the devout paid! The poor, the crippled, the non-Jewish had no real chance of entering the kingdom of heaven. With a shekkel you bought a stone that showed your allegiance to one of the 12 tribes, with this you entered the temple. The story of Jesus turning over the tables of the money lenders reflect this. He believed everyone was welcome as long as they held the kingdom of heaven in their heart, and that temples and churches were not places of worship, god would hear you whether you were in a field or on a hill.

I guess what I'm saying is that Facebook, forums and Twitter has become those temples, that people seeking the true idea of Anonymous flock to. But like the temples of ancient Jerusalem and the modern churches in our cities and towns they are false<sup>553</sup>.

548 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 2012, 11.

549 Ibid., 22.

550 Ibid., 23.

551 Ibid., 22.

552 Jaime Ortega Simo, "Facebook The Social Filter of World Intelligence," *The Daily Journalist*, posted July 2, 2012,

<http://thedailyjournalist.com/theinvestigative/facebook-the-social-filter-of-world-intelligence/>.

553 "Anonymous R.I.P.," *Anon UK Radio*, posted August 21, 2013,



### The International Response to Anonymous

Talking about things happening on the internet, especially relative to Anonymous' history, can appear frivolous and unimportant compared to global politics and wars. The first part of Anonymous' history is consumed by the kind of inconsequential bickering and drama which happens on social media platforms every day. However Anonymous are one of the most important social constructs to come out of this primordial soup of internet culture. We can find evidence for this by again looking at Anonymous' reflection; the legislative and policy documents which have been written in response to their actions. The 2011 NATO Draft General Report 074 CDS 11 E Information and National Security<sup>554</sup> and 2013 White House-published International Strategy for Cyberspace<sup>555</sup>. The NATO Information and National Security Report states that:

Anonymous is becoming more and more sophisticated and could potentially hack into sensitive government, military, and corporate files. According to reports in February 2011, Anonymous demonstrated its ability to do just that [referring to the HBGary attacks discussed previously]. Today, the ad-hoc international group of hackers and activists is said to have thousands of operatives and has no set rules or membership. It remains to be seen how much time Anonymous has for pursuing such paths. The longer these attacks persist the more likely countermeasures will be developed, implemented, the groups will be infiltrated and perpetrators prosecuted<sup>556</sup>.

The report comments on the problem of the inherent imbalance between attack and defence, that 'Perpetrators need only one weak point to get inside the network, while defenders have to secure all vulnerabilities'<sup>557</sup>. Further paragraphs list organisations and research bodies such as the NATO Cyber Defence Management Authority (CDMA) and Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE)<sup>558</sup>. These institutions are focussed on coordinating defence systems and monitoring/dealing with threats to networks on a larger scale. None of these frameworks helped any of LulzSec's targets later in the same year.

<http://anonukradio.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/anonymous-rip.html>.

554 Lord Michael Jopling: *074 CDS 11 E - Information and National Security*, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2011,

<http://www.nato-pa.int/default.asp?SHORTCUT=2443>.

555 The White House, *International Strategy for Cyberspace: Prosperity, Security and Openness in a Networked World*, May 2011,

[https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/international\\_strategy\\_for\\_cyberspace.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/international_strategy_for_cyberspace.pdf).

556 Lord Michael Jopling: *074 CDS 11 E - Information and National Security*, paragraph 25.

557 Ibid, paragraphs 31-32.

558 Ibid, paragraph 45.

This report also highlights the disparity between the relative developmental speeds of communications technologies and the relevant legal frameworks to accommodate them. As with the man who tried to stop a telegraph with the results of a horse race but no legal definition of such activity as a crime existed<sup>559</sup>, Lord Jopling argues that there is 'no agreement within the international community as to which...cyber activities constitute a crime'<sup>560</sup>. He also states that given the existence and destructive potential of sophisticated tools like Stuxnet the application of Article 5 of the NATO charter; an armed attack against one member state is an attack against all and said state can expect assistance in mounting a collective defence, should not be ruled out as a collective policy response against for computer assisted or mediated attacks<sup>561</sup>. This report and the White House 2013 International Strategy for Cyberspace paper bookend the apex of Anonymous activity in the 2011-2013 period. The latter does not mention Anonymous specifically; however it discusses similar ideas of collective defence, not ruling out a physical and kinetic response to a cyber-attack<sup>562</sup>. The fact that the discussion of such serious issues mentions Anonymous directly or implicitly in the same breath is indicative of their importance in this space.

This increase in severity and magnitude of the response to Anonymous' online is reflected in the physical world too. As outlined in the opening of the first chapter, Anonymous' annual global protest event on November 5<sup>th</sup> has now become known as the 'Million Mask March', a permanent feature on the Anonymous event calendar. As discussed in chapter 5, this event draws on the imagery and symbolism of the Guy Fawkes mask, V for Vendetta and the November 5 Gunpowder Plot as a form of politicised popular culture re-enactment. Taking the Million Mask March event in London as a case study, we can look at how the London Metropolitan Police has reacted to and attempted to control the protests from 2012-2015. Protesters gather in Trafalgar Square in the late afternoon and early evening, eventually marching down Whitehall to the Houses of Parliament. Once here the protest often splinters and divides; some groups head to Oxford Street, Buckingham Palace or simply roam the streets to evade the police. In 2012 the police presence was relatively subdued. Riot-equipped vans took up positions on Trafalgar Square outside the National Gallery and on the

559 *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-line Pioneers* (New York: Walker Publishing Inc., 1998), 120.

560 Lord Michael Jopling: *074 CDS 11 E - Information and National Security*, paragraph 30.

561 Ibid, paragraph 65.

562 The White House, *International Strategy for Cyberspace: Prosperity, Security and Openness in a Networked World*, 13-14.

roundabout leading to Whitehall<sup>563564</sup>:



563 Collins, Ben. "Police on Trafalgar Square". 2012. JPEG image  
564 Collins, Ben. "Police on Trafalgar Square 2". 2012. JPEG image

There was also a visible police presence extending down Whitehall itself as well as in the surrounding area past Horse guards parade ground<sup>565566</sup>:



565 Collins, Ben. "Police on Whitehall". 2012. JPEG image

566 Collins, Ben. "Police on Horseguards". 2012. JPEG image



Throughout the afternoon and evening the police had taken a largely passive role, the officers present kept their distance as Trafalgar Square emptied and the crowds marched down Whitehall, doing little at first to stop the crowds blocking traffic as they went. Once the protesters began gathering in Parliament Square there was a more concentrated effort to contain and control them. Barricades were deployed along with more riot vans and lines of officers in front of the Houses of Parliament to keep protesters on Parliament Square itself<sup>567</sup>:



A similarly measured approach was taken the following year however there was an extra police presence in the form of blue-jacketed Protest Liaison Officers whose role is to '...inform themselves about the culture and general conduct of particular protest crowds' and that officers on the ground 'should engage with crowd members to gather information about their intentions, demeanour, concerns and sensibilities'<sup>568</sup>. In this next picture the blue-jacketed Liaison Officer is engaging with the group of protesters in the foreground while the regular officers in yellow jackets standing on the steps leading up to the National Gallery in the far left<sup>569</sup>:

567 Collins, Ben. "Protesters in Parliament Square". 2012. JPEG image

568 "Police Liaison Officers," *The Network for Police Monitoring*, accessed November 8, 2015, <https://netpol.org/police-liaison-officers/>.

569 Collins, Ben. "Anonymous in Trafalgar Square". 2012. JPEG image



The police presence and attitude changed significantly in 2014. Parliament Square was completely walled off with two layers of barricades and fences. This was due to the Occupy protest that had set up camp on Parliament Square the previous month<sup>570</sup>:



570 Alexander Rucki, "Occupy London protesters start week long demonstration in Parliament Square," *London Evening Standard*, posted October 18, 2014, <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/occupy-london-protesters-start-week-long-demonstration-9803689.html>.



This was the first time that Parliament Square had been cordoned off for the Million Mask March. This ended up having a counter-productive effect. Although the march was allowed to proceed in its usual route and manner the entire crowd was forced into the road in front of the Houses of Parliament. In previous years the crowd had been able to stand on Parliament Square, accelerating the process of getting the marooned traffic out of the way. Instead the unlucky cars involved were stuck for what seemed like hours. Another new addition for 2014 was a police van parked by the National Gallery with a large speaker tower mounted on top. Every few minutes it would broadcast a message warning of the dangers of climbing on the monuments, letting off fireworks and other disruptive activities. Every time this message was broadcast it received a cacophony of jeers, swearing and condemnation from the amassed crowds. The specifics of how climbing on monuments such as Nelson's Column, the lion statues or the fountains in the square was going to cause more long-term damage than to the hundreds of tourists who do so on a daily basis was not made clear. Throughout the afternoon and evening all of these labelled activities were performed and 10 people were arrested over the course of the day<sup>571</sup>.

The build-up to the 2015 Million Mask March included some controversial and criticised preemptive suggestions by the police, stating that they expected violence at the march<sup>572</sup>. This expectation turned out to be entirely justified; 50 people were arrested throughout the night for violence against police and public order offences<sup>573</sup>. The broadcast van from 2014 did not make a return appearance, replaced instead with double-sided, full-colour information sheets with a map of the permitted places and times for the Million Mask March<sup>574</sup>:

571 Ewan Palmer, "Million Mask March: 10 People Arrested During Anonymous London Protest," *International Business Times*, posted November 6, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/million-mask-march-10-people-arrested-during-anonymous-london-protest-1473409>.

572 Robin de Peyer, "Million Mask March London 2015: Police warn of risk of violence as thousands set for 'Anonymous' protest," *London Evening Standard*, posted November 4, 2015, <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/million-mask-march-2015-police-warn-of-risk-of-violence-as-thousands-set-for-anonymous-protest-a3106116.html>.

573 Jon Austin, Selina Sykes and Scott Campbell, "Million Mask March: 50 arrested after Anonymous protest turns violent on streets of London," *The Express*, posted November 6, 2015, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/617296/Million-Mask-March-Anonymous-protest-violence-protesters-police-riot>.

574 MPS Events (@MetPoliceEvents), Twitter post, November 5, 2015, 4:31p.m., <https://twitter.com/MetPoliceEvents/status/662306290849464321>.



**Million Mask March**  
**Thursday 5th November 2015**  
**LONDON**

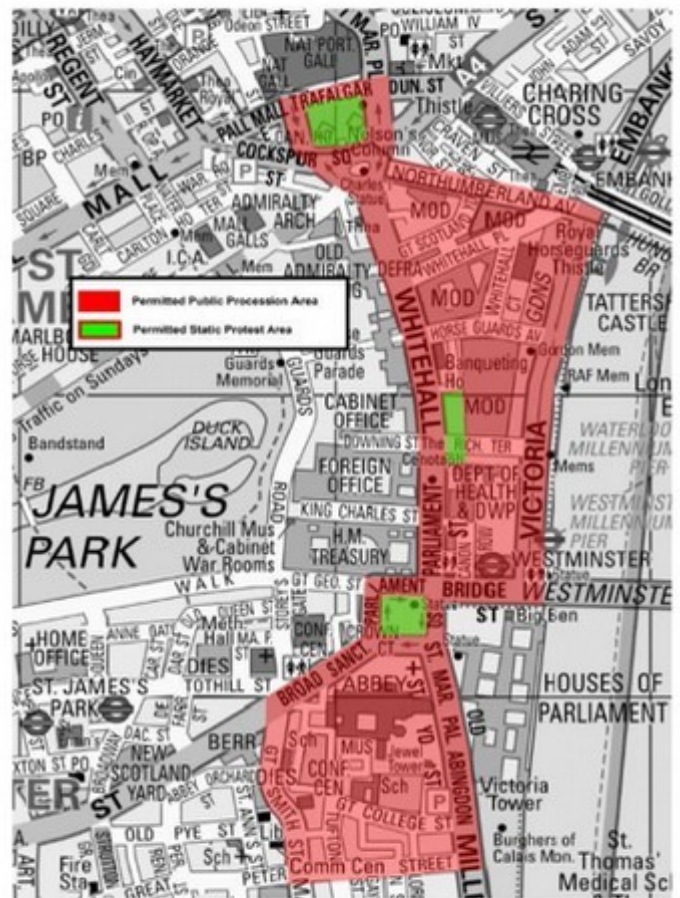
**IMPORTANT**

**Section 12 & Section 14 Public Order Act 1986**

In order to prevent serious disruption to the life of the community and/or serious disorder, the following conditions have been placed upon this event:

1. Any static assembly can only be held at the following locations:
  - Trafalgar Square
  - In the area in the centre of Parliament Square (known as Parliament Square Gardens)
  - In the barriered area on the East Footway of Whitehall, opposite Downing Street (known as Richmond Terrace)
2. Any assembly held at any of these three locations will start no earlier than 1800hrs and conclude no later than 2100hrs
3. The march will commence from Trafalgar Square and must stay within the area bounded by Trafalgar Square, Northumberland Avenue, Victoria Embankment, Bridge Street, St Margaret Street, Abingdon Street, Millbank (up to junction with Great Peter Street), Great Peter Street (up to junction with Great Smith Street), Broad Sanctuary, Parliament Square, Parliament Street, Whitehall.
4. The march must not commence before 1800hrs
5. The march must not continue after 2100hrs
6. The participants must follow the directions of a constable even if the route is varied.
7. There will be no motor-vehicles as part of the procession.

If you take part in the Million Mask March you must adhere to these conditions, failure to do so may lead to arrest and prosecution. The conditions may be subject to change by the Senior Officer present - if in doubt please consult a Police Officer.



These measures included limiting the time-frame for the protest to between 1800-2100hrs and only in the area around Trafalgar Square, opposite Downing Street and Parliament Square are concurrent with the analysis by Starr et al who indicate such tactics ‘...seek to channel protest into pre-established spaces and predictable flows in order to foreclose the potential for disruption...’<sup>575</sup> This may be one area where Anonymous’ anarchic and paradoxically self-motivated approach to collective organisation plays into their favour as, shown through the media coverage of the continuing and spreading protests carrying on well into the night<sup>576</sup>, these controlling measures were ignored or negated completely.

<sup>575</sup> Starr et al (2011), 47.

<sup>576</sup> Chris Johnston and Damien Gayle, "Million Mask march in London – as it happened," *The Guardian*, posted November 5, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/live/2015/nov/05/million-mask-march-gathers-in-london-live-updates>.

On the face of it, the escalated measures to control Anonymous' protests in central London over the past 4 years of have been inversely proportional to their success; all the maps, loudspeakers and other measures have not stopped Guy Fawkes-masked protesters running amok in central London year<sup>577</sup> on year<sup>578</sup>. Anonymous is a reactive and self-attributing set of shared symbols which functions as a language for protest and indignation, a driving factor which translates into physical actions too. This language has been built on years of capricious rhetoric and action against any targets who present themselves. In the same way that anyone can attach themselves to the Anonymous identity online the same process takes place when Anonymous gathers in person. Taking these dynamics and motivations of Anonymous into account, efforts such as the Metropolitan Police's Liaison Officers and documents such as the above permitted protest times and locations have been in vain, falling on deaf ears and masked eyes. However given the controversial nature of Police Liaison Officers who some consider to be more interested in covert intelligence gathering than engaging in any real dialogue<sup>579</sup>, Anonymous' decentralised structure and self-attributing politics may help to counter their efforts.

The Million Mask Marches may be popular with the participants however this same anarchic approach limits their effectiveness. Even larger and more organised strikes or more violent protests, according to David Graeber citing early 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary syndicalist Georges Sorel:

...are not really revolutionary because ordinarily, a strike aims to win concessions on wages, hours, or conditions that the state will then guarantee and, ultimately, enforce. One is, therefore, not challenging state violence but trying to enlist it for one's own side.<sup>580</sup>

577 "'Anonymous' protesters clash with police in London," *The Telegraph*, posted November 6, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsvideo/uk-politics-video/10429741/Anonymous-protesters-clash-with-police-in-London.html>.

578 Aubrey Allegretti, "Million Mask March London 2015 Live: Bonfire Night Chaos Ensues As As Three Police Officers Injured And Patrol Car Set Ablaze," *The Huffington Post*, last modified November 6, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/11/05/million-mask-march-london-2015-arrests-protest-traffic-square-parliament\\_n\\_8480438.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/11/05/million-mask-march-london-2015-arrests-protest-traffic-square-parliament_n_8480438.html).

579 "Police Liaison Officers," *The Network for Police Monitoring*.

580 Graeber, 205.

Anonymous' lack of visible goals which can be easily translated to groups with similar motives as well as to the wider population who they claim to be acting for/seeking support for popular uprisings from means that they fall short of the wildcat strikes and other more militant actions which are still acting within the physical and confines of the very systems they oppose. Even if Anonymous had a clear mandate or unifying direction, unless such a direction was based on the disregarding of the power structures they oppose so vehemently or on the establishment of a parallel system of their own<sup>581</sup> then they are still bound up by this contradiction of ultimately seeking the permission or acquiescence of their targets rather than achieving their aims through their own agency.

The judicial response to Anonymous' criminal actions and the physical response to their particular brand of politics provide useful framing for understanding Anonymous in a similar manner to how they understand themselves through casting themselves as the antithesis to whoever their target du-jour may be. However this only provides half of the picture; it is also necessary to look at how Anonymous have been received by A-culture and the wider Internet Culture. This will include how Anonymous have been received on social media platforms/communities and how they are depicted by the same cultural mechanisms that helped them rise to prominence in the first place. Finally it will look at Anonymous' reflection in the eyes of conspiracy theorists and other fringe political groups who consider them as false-flag operators/a part of the systems they claim to oppose.

#### "We r legun" - The Internet Responds to Anonymous

After the fall of LulzSec in 2011 it was apparent that the reality of Anonymous was at odds with their reputation as bogeymen of the internet. Anonymous have had their detractors and critics throughout their lifespan, but the complete undermining of one of their most effective and famous cells opened up the debate to wider participation. Such criticisms include questioning Anonymous' capability to affect real change at all. Anonymous have 'declared war' on a wide range of targets and for a wide range of causes, all of which continue to function to this day or have not changed in any meaningful way<sup>582</sup>. These criticisms originally came from the technology/internet-focused news media spaces and social media but have

581 Graeber, 240.

582 Brian Feldman, "An Incomplete List of Every Person, Place, and Institution Upon Which Anonymous Has 'Declared War'," *New York Magazine*, posted March 15, 2016.  
<http://nymag.com/selectall/2016/03/everything-upon-which-anonymous-has-declared-war.html>.

been joined by critical voices coming from mainstream news sources like CNN, which will be discussed more specifically in the next chapter.

Anonymous are not immune from the same processes of visual deconstruction and satire which helped create the Anonymous identity. As time has passed Anonymous' hyperbolic rhetoric, 'declarations of war' and operation videos have lost their novelty and are increasingly met with apathy rather than fear and trepidation, leading the creation and distribution of materials criticising Anonymous which vary in sincerity and cynicism.

These criticisms follow several broad trends. A common form of criticism comes from sharing pictures of people who have made their own Guy Fawkes rather than either buying the licensed film replicas or one of the plainer bootleg masks. These masks are either presented as objects of ridicule on their own or contextually in pictures of Anons protesting in public. A good example of the latter is 'New Zealand Fail Guy'. A small group of New Zealand Anons were photographed in a town centre, all wearing crude Guy Fawkes masks<sup>583</sup>:



583 "New Zealand Fail Guy," *Encyclopedia Dramatica*, accessed July 24, 2016, [https://encyclopediadramatica.se/New\\_Zealand\\_Fail\\_Guy](https://encyclopediadramatica.se/New_Zealand_Fail_Guy).



In these cases the commentary on Anonymous and its related humour is derived from several factors. Firstly this group of six Anons standing around a camping table is a far cry from the masked crowds in the finale of V for Vendetta or at the Million Mask Marches around the world. Secondly much of the humorous critique of Anonymous comes from the incompatibility of internet culture with the ‘real world’, that their visual language is utterly impenetrable and stands out as ludicrous when seen on the street by the rest of society. The improvised masks round off the critique being made by pictures such as these, that Anonymous is, as discussed in chapter 5, an ‘epic fail’<sup>584</sup>; that Anonymous take themselves seriously in a way which comes across as comically tragic when seen outside of the internet. The Anon on the far right of the group and/or his amateur Guy Fawkes mask have been placed into a range of images which either criticise Anonymous’ effectiveness against the Church of Scientology or place him in humorous situations as a form of satire. This image casts New Zealand as a flock of masked sheep, implying that Anonymous are not particularly intelligent and follow each blindly as well as referencing the status of sheep farming as one of New Zealand’s primary industries.



584 “Epic Fail Guy,” Know Your Meme, last modified October 3, 2011, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/epic-fail-guy>.



In this second image he is in the cast line-up for the cast of Power Rangers, a US remake of Japanese superhero TV series for children<sup>585</sup>:



This mechanism of satire and referential critique through association with certain aspects of popular culture is one that is hard to unpick and to explain. The above picture works on several subjective levels of interpretation and cultural nuance. Shows like Power Rangers are aimed at children so are upbeat, idealistic and either gloss over any moral issues or present them in a simplistic manner. This picture associates this particular Anon, and therefore the Anonymous identity as a whole, with these characteristics in an implicitly cynical way; that Anonymous are equally as idealistic and naive.

A number of critical videos play on the stereotypes of Anonymous as internet nerds/wannabe activists who just make videos in their bedrooms. Produced independently of each other they tend to follow the same narrative and present the same critiques; an Anon wearing a Guy Fawkes mask is talking into the camera in a dark room, using the same dramatic rhetoric seen in operation videos. Mid-sentence the door to the room opens and their mother brings them some food, asks how long they're going to be or says they should go outside<sup>586</sup>:

585 "New Zealand Fail Guy," *Encyclopedia Dramatica*.

586 ibs221, "But mom, I'm trying to be Anonymous," YouTube video, 0:09, posted December 5, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nFGtq\\_iBQg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nFGtq_iBQg).



Another longer video expands on this theme<sup>587</sup>:

[Anon, in a dark room talking to the camera] We are Anonymous. We are legion. We will disrupt Canadian communications unless Bill C30 is scrapped and Minister Toews steps down...

\*Mother opens bedroom door\*

[Mother] Timmy? Are you still on the computer?

[A] Mom, I'm trying to make a video!

[M] You are spending too much time in this room, why don't you go outside and play?

[A] I'm trying to fight the government!

[M] (sighs) Look at this place, it's a disaster!

[A] This is serious, I'm Anonymous!

[M] No you're not, you're Timmy Moffat!

[A, into the camera] Ignore this woman; she knows not of what she speaks, she's an agent of the government!

587 MrCaptainOriginal, "Anonymous Fail LoL," YouTube video, 0:45, posted March 9, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AygwaYpinQw>.

[M, as she grabs a vacuum cleaner and leaves] Oh you are just hilarious! You know what sweetie, just ten more minutes on that video game then I want you to shut it right off...

The third kind of visual critique has a much harsher tone which is ironically closer to Anonymous themselves. The example below takes an image of a child with a Guy Fawkes mask face paint design and overlays poorly-spelled versions of Anonymous' language<sup>588</sup>:



These satirical materials present Anonymous as incompetent, immature, naive or that the Anonymous identity is incompatible with 'real life'. These satirical materials draw their effectiveness from this disconnect between Anonymous' apocalyptic and hyperbolic rhetoric and the reality of their actions, presenting Anonymous' as childish or pretentious and therefore lacking a legitimate political position<sup>589</sup>.

Throughout Anonymous' history humour has been a valuable currency. It has been weaved through a framework of popular culture in a way which defies the typically cynical attitude of most political satire<sup>590</sup>. The visual output of this wider reaction takes this mechanism and

588 "Master Trole Kid – giga trole," *Know Your Meme*, accessed July 26, 2016, <http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/957643-master-trole-kid>.

589 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower*, *Spy*, 175.

590 Rebecca Higgie, "Kynical dogs and cynical masters: Contemporary satire, politics and truth-telling,"

launches it back at Anonymous This cynical and critical attitude is driven by the idea that for all their statements, declarations of war and bragging on Twitter Anonymous have had little effect beyond their own constituency, outside of which they are not taken seriously.

These materials are an example of how entrenched in what David Auerbach's 'A-culture' as described in chapter 1; especially the principles of velocity, ironisation, self-documentation and elitism<sup>591</sup>. Anonymous has to keep moving, finding new targets to align against. Without an identifiable enemy to fight they are overtaken and consumed by inevitable digital entropy which can only be slowed rather than stopped. In Anonymous' early days this velocity kept them safe from retaliation. The proto-Anons would appear out of nowhere, attack and then disappear to find new targets. This velocity has had a negative effect on Anonymous' image in the long-term, making the Anonymous identity appear schizophrenic, indecisive or lacking staying power to follow through on any of their declarations.

A-culture's second characteristic ironisation is where these materials show the duality of Anonymous' relationship with the internet. Ironisation is the process of finding sources of parody or ridicule in anything. In Anonymous' early days this included taking the absolutely serious but clumsy threats of their victims and turning them into badges of honour or linguistic currency to build one's reputation. This cynical outlook helped to build Anonymous' reputation as vicious arbiters of the internet however since the end of LulzSec in 2011 this reputation has diminished through inaction or ineffectiveness. Whereas Ironisation was a source of considerable power for Anonymous in the past, this source has been turned against them<sup>592</sup>:

*International Journal of Humor Research* 27, no. 2 (2014): 183.

591 David Auerbach, "Anonymity as Culture: Treatise," Triple Canopy issue 15. Last modified February 19, 2012.

[https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/15/contents/anonymity\\_as\\_culture\\_\\_treatise](https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/15/contents/anonymity_as_culture__treatise).

592 "Old Anonymous," *JoyReactor*, posted March 30, 2010, <http://joyreactor.com/post/881316>.



The third characteristic of self-documentation plays into this process as well. The critical response expressed by these images has been crystallised from individual sentiments into shareable and retrievable images. This self-documentation is necessary to preserve the output of A-culture's velocity. Without this secondary documentation process 'internet culture' and Anonymous would operate in a bubble of disconnected thoughts and deeds unaware of their own history. This characteristic worked in Anonymous' favour to begin with; events such as the Habbo Hotel raid now live on as visual cues which have now become folklore and legend in the Internet's compressed history. However now that Anonymous have been shown to be fallible this process of documentation has been turned against them, preserving their failings for posterity and as part of the process of Ironisation.

Anonymous' elitism, the fourth category of A-culture, has proven to be a double-edged sword which they have fallen upon. Most of Anonymous' operations have shared a common latent motivation of dealing with someone or an organisation which has gotten 'too big for its boots'; attacking the Church of Scientology for trying to censor YouTube, attacking the recording/film industries for using DDOS attacks against online piracy sites with impunity and attacking regimes across North Africa and Israel for controlling internet access or censoring criticism/protest. The critical and equally visual satirical push-back against Anonymous is a shared yet disconnected reaction from online social communities<sup>593</sup> which has similar aims against the modern Anonymous; a group who have bought into their own rhetoric to the extent that they need to be brought down a peg or two themselves.

<sup>593</sup> Many of these images are hosted on social hubs/image aggregation sites like Reddit, FunnyJunk and 9gag; as with much of Anonymous' imagery and the Laughing Man from Ghost in the Shell, we will never know who created them originally or where they were hosted.



These images are so effective at undermining Anonymous' own brand of enigmatic and romantic hacker-activism because they are so close to Anonymous' own methods and history. This representation of Anonymous as ineffective nerds and sources of tragic comedy has gained traction among audiences which fall within Anonymous' internet culture constituency. YouTube video maker Justin Chandler aka 'Kosdff' regularly uploads videos of himself playing video games online, focusing on particularly funny interactions with other people. He sometimes encounters other players who threaten to hack his console, get him banned from playing online or, in one case, to burn down his house by overheating his router. He always calls their bluff as these threats are usually empty. When uploading videos to YouTube you can select an image to represent the video that others see while browsing through available content. This can be a still from the video or a custom image instead. The image Kosdff uses when posting videos of his interactions with such 'script kiddies'<sup>594</sup> usually have sensationalist tabloid headlines and depict someone who is either angry or upset wearing a Guy Fawkes mask<sup>595</sup>:



<sup>594</sup> A derogatory term implying that someone claiming to be a hacker is using pre-made tools; 'scripts', with no intrinsic capability themselves.

<sup>595</sup> Kosdff tK, YouTube Channel, accessed July 27, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/user/xKOSDFF/videos>.



This is not hidden in a corner of YouTube; Kosdfff's channel has over 950,000 subscribers and the four above videos alone have together been viewed over 500,000 times. Kosdfff's videos typically document him arguing with foul-mouthed teenagers who make threats against him and make claims of hacking prowess but cannot follow through with them. After Kosdfff calls their bluff they usually leave the game session without saying a word, claim that their friend is going to hack him later or they'll do it tomorrow. The use of the Guy Fawkes mask is a light-hearted but effective association of such behaviours with Anonymous and is another example of the processes discussed in chapter 5; that the internet can apply the same critical and de-constructive processes against Anonymous in turn. This association between 'script kiddies' in Call of Duty and Anonymous can only come from an environment where such associations have no risk of retaliation; Anonymous are no longer taken seriously by the young, technologically-adept demographic constituency who for years have been their source for recruitment and popular support. As such, taking this and their increasingly fractious and contradictory track record into account, it is becoming more difficult for anyone else to do the same.

These examples and the many more like them are an overlapping mixture of sincerity and ridicule; they present some biting points about Anonymous' naivety, how their language and symbolism are utterly alien to normal people and that they take themselves far too seriously given their origins in this same de-constructive strata of internet culture. There is another element of this online push-back against Anonymous which has eschewed the outer layers of humour and parody which unintentionally shows how successful in fostering dissent and paranoia among the wider Anonymous community.

Much like Anonymous, the conspiracy theory community "...seek to convert the masses, but also to satisfy their need to be recognised by the very mainstream that they consistently reject and accuse of being in the pockets of powerful conspirators"<sup>596</sup>. Conspiracy theories such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks were carried out by the US government to justify the invasion of the Middle East, that massive yet hidden organisations such as the Illuminati control world events and other such frameworks serve the same purpose as Anonymous; creating nemeses for the

596 Jovan Byford, "Beyond belief: the social psychology of conspiracy theories and the study of ideology," in *Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Psychology: Essays in Honour of Michael Billig. Explorations in Social Psychology*, edited by Charles Antaki and Susan Condor (London: Routledge, 2004), 93.

politically marginalised to pour the ills of the world onto<sup>597</sup>, while attempting to expand their own community and establish legitimacy. There is some overlap between the two; Anons have expressed conspiratorial ideas through YouTube videos<sup>598</sup> and similar sentiments relating to global financial control and the imbalance of society at the Million Mask Marches<sup>599</sup>:



Despite their similarity in organisational mechanisms, political outlook and expressing complementary views on the unfair nature of society, how the global elites are publicly and privately controlling the world and that we are constantly lied to about what is really going on in the world, Anonymous cannot escape the gravitational pull of this parallel collective mechanism of adversarial political organisation. The accusations against Anonymous vary greatly in believability and sensibility. Some claim that Anonymous is part of a larger Jesuit conspiracy<sup>600</sup> or that they are a tool of the New World Order/Illuminati<sup>601</sup>:

597 Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 15.

598 MakeGameServer, "Anonymous – 9/11," YouTube video, 31:37, posted March 12, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zS-V38OxWDo>.

599 "The Million Mask March, in pictures," *The Telegraph*, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/11977841/The-Million-Mask-March-in-pictures.html?frame=3493303>.

600 Terry Simkins, "GUY FAWKES MASK = JESUITS MASKS = DISINFO AND PROVOCATEURS OF ...", Facebook video, 11:00, posted August 7, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/ANTISLAVEBOY/videos/10207358986359367/>.

601 "Analysis of Esoteric Iconography used by 'Anonymous'," *DisInfoBahn*, posted September 26, 2011, <https://disinfobahn.wordpress.com/2011/09/26/esoteric-analysis-of-anonymous-iconography/>.

Anonymous fulfils the need to rebel against the System while satisfying the objectives of the System. People are made to feel that they have been initiated into an exclusive cabal and that they are smarter than the average citizen. They are offered a ready-made “online revolution package” while the New World Order quietly collects data on Anonymous members, some of who may dabble in revolution with less conviction than they have for maintaining their virtual farms. This data is used to trap people into working for the Illuminati, or it is saved to ruin people’s lives in the future. It is pure COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program)...

Other accusations state that events like the Million Mask Marches have been set up/infiltrated/run by the police/government/New World Order<sup>602</sup>:

The Million Mask March has been infiltrated. We know that November the 5th this year is going to be a psyop. There will be infiltrators just like all other protests. They will infiltrate using Anonymous' image, Anonymous' name and they will create violence which will discredit Anonymous entirely.

Anonymous does not support the Million Mask March 2016. It is a set up -run by government swine using the name Anonymous and we must end it now.

It is time to man your stations! The battle is upon us.

Please share this message and video. Do not attend the Million Mask March on November 5th this year. It is a trap and it is a government plot. We must counter their plot by exposing them all. We must unite, as we used to, and Cure Anonymous.

Another video making similar accusations about ‘fake’ Anons who are either only interested in making money from merchandise/advertising revenue from their own websites or who are actually government agents presents itself as a form of educational/public service announcement<sup>603</sup>:

It has come to our attention that government agents are acting as Anonymous imposters and fake Anons are using the name of Anonymous to profit financially, spreading political propaganda...this is affecting the good name of Anonymous and our worldwide collective of brothers and sisters of the Anonymous idea. Anonymous has gained the respect of millions around the world and for this reason governments are getting worried...We encourage those of you watching this video to use the following warning information...to help you easily identify...a genuine Anonymous social media page/group/channel or account.

602 Fearless One, “\*~ Anonymous Exposes Million Mask March 2016 PsyOp ~\*,” YouTube video, 7:48, posted August 2, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-eY1q3ystE>.

603 ANONYMOUS tv. “Fake ANONYMOUS USERS,” YouTube video, 11:47, posted September 4, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72ZZUdkRgR8>.

They are damaging the name of Anonymous, posting their own propaganda and ideologies, doing their best to destroy the Anon idea...

So when you see these fake...Anon accounts...look for the signs below we will mention; have nothing to do with them. Unlike and un-follow them immediately...

The video then goes on to list criteria such as selling merchandise and encouraging users to click through to other websites before diverging onto conspiracy topics which are “worth researching further.” These conspiracy theories and pseudo-witch hunts are an important part of understanding both how Anonymous is perceived by elements of their own constituency and the wider internet. The above examples show how far some of Anonymous have moved away from the lulz as a motivating factor and take themselves seriously in a way which the Anonymous of 2008 would have found ridiculous.

The elaborate logical frameworks of conspiracy theories construct secrets and hidden truths which are kept hidden yet can be decoded through symbolism visible in films, music videos and political speeches by those with ‘open minds’ or who are willing to see ‘the truth’. This serves to construct a clear enemy or source of the world’s problems as well as providing a platform or sense of purpose to people who feel disenfranchised or irrelevant in comparison to such monolithic political or economic forces. Anonymous functions along the same lines, however even they are not above suspicion.

The most important thing to take away from these examples is that the effects of LulzSec’s infiltration and destruction have traveled further and deeper than the simple removal of skilled individuals from Anonymous’ talent pool. The public revelations that one of their most successful teams was undermined from the beginning has helped perpetuate the paranoid narrative that anyone could have been turned into an informant or is an intelligence officer trying to infiltrate Anonymous has gotten some Anons looking under every digital rock and jumping at their own online shadows; whether they believe such measures to be part of criminal investigations or some elaborate global master-plan.

During presentations on this subject to both academic and civil service audiences one question comes up almost every time; is it possible to defeat or co-opt Anonymous? Materials like the ones discussed in this chapter show is that Anonymous are perfectly capable of defeating

themselves. This is the result of a lack of unifying direction among a community which only exists through a set of shared yet vague symbols. Anonymous has immersed itself the language of secrets and paranoia, the methods of secrecy or exposure, but with none of the resiliency or organisation to prevent such measures affecting themselves.

### Conclusion

This chapter has examined how Anonymous' targets respond to their attacks, how the internet has reacted to Anonymous and how we can again turn to history to understand this relationship. The unusually weighted sentences handed out to Anonymous activists are longer than those attributed to career criminals, child abusers and murderers; crimes which appear to be more severe or worthy of punishment. The subversive and counter-narrative implications of Anonymous' actions are far more intimidating; they can be easily replicated by Anons and serve as a justification for the technophobic 'old' media<sup>604</sup> Launching a DDOS attack and/or sharing copyrighted material is much easier and crucially more acceptable than mass murder, regardless of whether this acceptance comes from apathy or from solidarity with the perpetrators. As their online campaigns have escalated against bigger and more resourceful targets, Anonymous have suffered an increasing number of casualties in the form of arrests and convictions designed to deter the rest of the collective from following in the footsteps of LulzSec, Jeremy Hammond and Aaron Schwartz.

Anonymous are not immune from the gravitational pull of their formative environment; as well as being co-opted by the Culture Industry Anonymous' are no longer the 'last boss of the internet' that they once were. This reduction in threat has opened up the conversation around Anonymous' effectiveness and capability through critical avenues across multiple spectra of sincerity, humour and underlying logic. The fact that Anonymous has been turned on by the same adversarial and conspiratorial mechanisms which drives much of its own activity shows how effective the legislative and judicial response by police forces and governments have been in countering Anonymous' operational capability and social cohesion.

Anonymous are not the only group involved in in the political arenas of digital rights, information access, whistle-blowing and challenging state authority on the internet, however

604 Tim Jordan and Paul A. Taylor, *Hactivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a cause?* (London: Routledge, 2004), 27.

as has been discussed they have not been met with universal praise. The next chapter will expand on some of these critiques through looking at some of Anonymous' most recent campaigns against ISIS and Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign, questioning whether Anonymous is still legion and whether we should continue to expect them.



## Chapter Eight – Should we continue to expect Anonymous?

Standing in the middle of the masked crowds of Anons in Trafalgar Square on a cold November evening is an electric experience; it is very easy to get caught up in the intoxicating waves of combined hostility and enthusiasm which keep the various causes being celebrated or denounced moving in roughly the same direction. However, if you can separate yourself from this rolling momentum and observe what is happening critically, then a number of awkward questions become apparent. The first and most ominous question is 'what the point of it all?' With so many people representing so many different political positions and causes it becomes very difficult for anyone outside of Anonymous to understand or take anything away from it other than a group of strange people with Guy Fawkes masks being annoying in a public space. This is a microcosm of the problems faced by Anonymous in the wider context of the internet, internet culture and the rest of society. As discussed in the last chapter the Anonymous identity has been reeling from the aftershocks of the demise of LulzSec for 4 years; curtailed by a reduced will to engage in the spectacular confrontational attacks which made them famous in the first place while being eaten away by paranoia from the inside. This chapter will elaborate on this by contextualising Anonymous' post-LulzSec history, their potential rejuvenation through campaigns against ISIS and the KKK in 2015/2016. As with all of Anonymous' activities this has not been a harmonious process; their campaign against Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign publicly exposed the infighting and disharmony which Anonymous takes great care to hide behind the mask.

This chapter will then consider whether Anonymous can be considered as successful. Can we measure the effects of Anonymous' operational record? Is it more appropriate to consider Anonymous' historical legacy through the fact that despite their reactionary and reflexive approach to politics, the idea of Anonymous continues to circulate among generations who are criticised for ignoring politics beyond themselves or their touch-screen devices<sup>605</sup>. Anonymous did not develop in a bubble; lobbyist and activist groups like the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the myriad Pirate Parties and the wider digital rights movement have been operating in parallel with Anonymous, with groups like the EFF pre-dating them by 15 years. Examining this spectrum of other activist groups highlights the extent to which Anonymous is

605 Helen Lewis, "Apathy or antipathy? Why so few young people vote," *The Guardian*, posted April 19, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/19/why-young-people-dont-vote-apathy-or-antipathy-election-2015>.

caught between organisations whose can interact with mainstream political systems and whistle-blowers who have had greater impact on their targets and the wider political discourse than Anonymous have ever achieved.

#### The broader sphere of digital activism – where does Anonymous fit?

Anonymous did not develop in isolation and were not the first to engage in the politics of communications technologies. From the mid-1980s programmer and political activist Phil Zimmerman worked on encryption software that became the public key encryption program PGP<sup>606</sup>. PGP was created so that anyone to communicate securely without fear of anyone (in Zimmerman's case, the NSA) being able to intercept or decrypt their correspondence. Zimmerman saw the developments in communications technology in the same way that the Electric Telegraph was seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both of these systems traded security and privacy for speed; messages could be sent around the world in a fraction of the time it would take a physical message to travel by coach, ship or even train, but they were read by every operator on the telegraph network and any number of unknown third parties along the way. Zimmerman created a digital encryption system that transmitted its own decryption key with the message, both of which were vetted through a system of communal trust by known third parties<sup>607</sup>. In 1991 a new draft of Senate Bill 266 forced Zimmerman to accelerate development of PGP. The main focus of Senate Bill 266 was anti-terrorism legislation however an amended section proposed changes to the way that the government could access to communications data. Containing language relevant into the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>608</sup>, the bill stated that 'communications systems permit the government to obtain the plain text contents of voice, data, and other communications when appropriately authorized by law'<sup>609</sup>. Zimmerman was forced to release PGP ahead of the bill becoming law. PGP was spread and uploaded around the world, making Senate Bill 266 irrelevant before it could be passed as there was now a way for anyone to circumvent this requirement<sup>610</sup>.

606 Stephen Levy, *Crypto: How the Code Rebels Beat the Government-Saving Privacy in the Digital Age* (New York:Penguin, 2002), 245.

607 Levy, *Crypto*, 242.

608 Alex Hern, "Apple declares victory in battle with FBI, but the war continues," *The Guardian*, posted March 29, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/mar/29/apple-victory-battle-fbi-but-war-continues-san-bernardino-iphone>.

609 Levy, *Crypto*, 246.

610 Ibid., 248.

The work of Zimmerman, his predecessors Whitfield Diffie and Martin Hellman and later by Eric Hughes, Timothy May and John Gilmore, were part of a rising wave of cryptographic guerrilla activism during the early 1990s whose discourse contains many ideas that are also prevalent in Anonymous' rhetoric and political statements a decade later. For example, Eric Hughes' 1993 'A Cypherpunk's Manifesto' states:

We cannot expect governments, corporations, or other large, faceless organizations to grant us privacy out of their beneficence. It is to their advantage to speak of us, and we should expect that they will speak. To try to prevent their speech is to fight against the realities of information. Information does not just want to be free, it longs to be free...

We must defend our own privacy if we expect to have any. We must come together and create systems which allow anonymous transactions to take place. People have been defending their own privacy for centuries with whispers, darkness, envelopes, closed doors, secret handshakes, and couriers. The technologies of the past did not allow for strong privacy, but electronic technologies do<sup>611</sup>.

The Cypherpunk movement engaged in varying acts of civil disobedience from small things like writing a version of the heavily-disputed RSA public key algorithm that could fit inside a forum signature<sup>612</sup> to taking the United States government to court for preventing publication of a paper discussing cryptography materials and code in 1995; such materials were under the same export restrictions as physical, kinetic weaponry<sup>613</sup>. The legal aid and assistance for this case came from the Electronic Frontier Foundation, an organisation and advocacy group founded in 1990 by members of the Cypherpunk community including John Gilmore. Throughout its history the EFF has campaigned for digital liberties, countering illegal surveillance and supporting fair use software through a string of successful legal cases, the first of which taking place in 1993<sup>614</sup>. *Steve Jackson Games v. Secret Service Case Archive* was one of the first cases to establish that online speech and discussion should have the same protection under the Constitution of the United States as any other kind of speech<sup>615</sup>. Within

611 Eric Hughes, "A Cypherpunk's Manifesto," *Activism*, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://www.activism.net/cypherpunk/manifesto.html>.

612 "Original Version," *Cyberspace*, accessed January 14, 2016, <http://www.cypherspace.org/rsa/org-post.html>.

613 "EFF's History," *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, accessed January 9, 2016, <https://www.eff.org/about/history>.

614 "Legal Victories," *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, accessed January 9, 2016, <https://www.eff.org/victories>.

615 "Steve Jackson Games v. Secret Service Case Archive," *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, accessed January 9, 2016, <https://www.eff.org/cases/steve-jackson-games-v-secret-service-case-archive>.

Anonymous' lifetime, similar organisations such as Big Brother Watch have provided policy advice on data protection, the use and retention of data in criminal databases and the proliferation of surveillance/CCTV systems<sup>616</sup>.

Other advocacy and activist organisations that emerged around the same time frame as Anonymous include the Open Rights Group<sup>617</sup> and European Digital Rights<sup>618</sup>. These organisations promote open-source software, challenge the unbalancing of individual liberties in exchange for copyright expansion as well as examine the legal basis for internet filtering measures.

Rickard Falkvinge created the Pirate Party in 2006 as a reaction to Swedish politicians' lack of enthusiasm for debating or proposing changes to copyright law and has grown into a network of international political parties engaging in traditional representative politics around the world. Originally limited to Sweden, Pirate Parties now operate around the world but the European and the United States arms are the most active<sup>619</sup>. Although each Pirate Party operates with their own national/regional agenda there are common policies which are shared by the Pirate Party as a whole; defending freedom of expression and ideas, reforming copyright law, promoting open data and scaling back of online and offline surveillance and censorship<sup>620</sup>.

The Pirate Parties aim to make progress '...by the means of the established political system rather than through activism'<sup>621</sup> and have had some sporadic successes. Following a string of electoral defeats in Sweden in 2009, the Swedish Pirate Party gained 2 seats on the Swedish delegation to the European Parliament which had been adjusted from one after the Treaty of Lisbon<sup>622</sup>. Although they were not re-elected in 2014, the German Pirate Party gained a seat in

616 "Campaigns," *Big Brother Watch*, accessed January 7, 2016,  
<http://www.bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/campaigns/>.

617 "About," *Open Rights Group*, accessed February 2, 2016,  
<https://www.openrightsgroup.org/about/>.

618 "About EDRi," *EDRi*, accessed February 6, 2016,  
<https://edri.org/about/>.

619 "About PPI," *Pirate Party International*, accessed February 20, 2016,  
<http://www.pp-international.net/about>.

620 Ibid.

621 Ibid.

622 Jack Schofield, "Sweden's Pirate Party wins EU seat (updated)," *The Guardian*, posted June 8, 2009,  
<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/blog/2009/jun/08/elections-pirate-party-sweden>.

the European Parliament instead<sup>623</sup>. Outside of this the Pirate Party has made significant gains in Iceland. According to political surveys in 2016 it is the most popular party in the country. If the opinion poll numbers translated into votes the Pirate Party would get 26 parliamentary seats in the event of an election, removing the majorities of the Independence and Progressive parties to form a majority government themselves<sup>624</sup>.

On the other end of the political spectrum we have to consider the impact of leaks and whistle-blowers such as Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange. Their motivations can be summed up as similar to those which connect much of the Anonymous community; exposing wrongdoing by embarrassing the perpetrators under the glare of public/media scrutiny. In 2010 Wikileaks released the now infamous 'Collateral Murder' video. Taken from a US Apache attack helicopter on mission in Iraq the video shows the crew deciding to open fire on a group they suspected to be carrying weapons. Rather than armed combatants the group consisted of journalists and a number of children. This shocking material was echoed by news agencies around the world, leading to debates over the conduct of modern warfare and the disputed levels of civilian casualties<sup>625</sup>. US Army intelligence officer Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning was arrested for supplying the video footage as well as other sensitive documents<sup>626</sup>. Later in 2010 Wikileaks published over 250,000 diplomatic cables to and from the United States dating back to the 1960s<sup>627</sup>. As well as contributing to the Arab Spring in early 2011<sup>628</sup> the fallout from these embarrassing leaks led to the establishment of a CIA task force whose sole purpose was to assess their global impact<sup>629</sup>.

623 Simon Sharwood, "Pirate Party runs aground in European Parliamentary elections," *The Register*, posted May 26, 2014, [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2014/05/26/european\\_voters\\_make\\_pirate\\_party\\_walk\\_the\\_plank/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2014/05/26/european_voters_make_pirate_party_walk_the_plank/).

624 "Pirate Party to Dominate Iceland Parliament, Survey Finds," *Torrentfreak*, posted March 14, 2016, <https://torrentfreak.com/pirate-party-to-dominate-iceland-parliament-survey-finds-160314/>.

625 "Grim truths of Wikileaks Iraq video," *The Guardian*, posted April 7, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2010/apr/07/wikileaks-collateral-murder-iraq-video>.

626 "US intelligence analyst arrested over security leaks," *BBC News*, posted June 7, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10254072>.

627 Dylan Welch, "US red-faced as 'cablegate' sparks global diplomatic crisis, courtesy of Wikileaks," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, posted November 29, 2010, <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/us-redfaced-as-cablegate-sparks-global-diplomatic-crisis-courtesy-of-wikileaks-20101128-18ccl.html>.

628 Elizabeth Dickinson, "The First Wikileaks Revolution?" *Foreign Policy*, posted January 13, 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/01/13/the-first-wikileaks-revolution/>.

629 Adam Gabbatt, "WTF? OMG, LOL! CIA gives Wikileaks taskforce naughty name," *The Guardian*, posted December 22, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/22/cia-wikileaks-taskforce-wtf>.

As discussed in chapter 6 the financial embargoes against Wikileaks were a direct result of the above events and were the stimuli needed to reform Anonymous' Operation Payback into Operation Avenge Assange. In 2014 intelligence contractor Edward Snowden leaked NSA documents revealing multiple global bulk surveillance systems including, but not limited to, back-doors into popular email services<sup>630</sup>, monitoring the communications of over 30 world leaders<sup>631</sup> and plans to infect millions of computers with data-harvesting viruses, including through a fake Facebook server<sup>632</sup>. In 2016 a massive leak of over 2 terabytes of data detailing the day-to-day running of Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca. Dubbed the 'Panama Papers', they exposed how the world's political and economic elite hid their wealth through circuitous tax avoidance loopholes<sup>633</sup>. The majority of Anonymous' 'leaks' are actually the dissemination of information which is technically already available to the public but may not be not widely known, or has already been leaked by others and they are making use of the ebb and flow of social media/news outrage as a vehicle for more attention themselves; acting as a signal boost for autonomously developing causes which the wider internet can react against.

#### Post-LulzSec degradation and dilution of attention

After the rise and fall of LulzSec in 2011 the calls for mass action and outrage continued along similarly bombastic lines regardless of the reality of Anonymous' position after Sabu's betrayal. The aggressive and antagonistic operations against Western governments and corporations which created Anonymous' reputation wound down or were less well organised. This section will explore the severity of degradation of collective will and operational capability through a few key examples. The 'Anonymous Operations' Facebook group announced a protest in central London on June 29 2013. The point of this protest was to challenge privatisation of the National Health Service, the increased use of genetically

630 Barton Gellman, "NSA infiltrates links to Yahoo, Google data centers worldwide, Snowden documents say," *The Washington Post*, posted October 30, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/nsa-infiltrates-links-to-yahoo-google-data-centers-worldwide-snowden-documents-say/2013/10/30/e51d661e-4166-11e3-8b74-d89d714ca4dd\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/nsa-infiltrates-links-to-yahoo-google-data-centers-worldwide-snowden-documents-say/2013/10/30/e51d661e-4166-11e3-8b74-d89d714ca4dd_story.html).

631 James Ball, "NSA monitored calls of 35 world leaders after US official handed over contacts," *The Guardian*, posted October 25, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/24/nsa-surveillance-world-leaders-calls>.

632 Ryan Gallagher and Glenn Greenwald, "How the NSA Plans To Infect 'Millions' Of Computers With Malware," *The Intercept*, posted March 12, 2014, <https://theintercept.com/2014/03/12/nsa-plans-infect-millions-computers-malware/>.

633 Luke Harding, "What are the Panama Papers? A guide to history's biggest data leak," *The Guardian*, posted April 5, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/apr/03/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-panama-papers>.



modified crops and visible resistance to austerity measures, among other causes<sup>634</sup>:



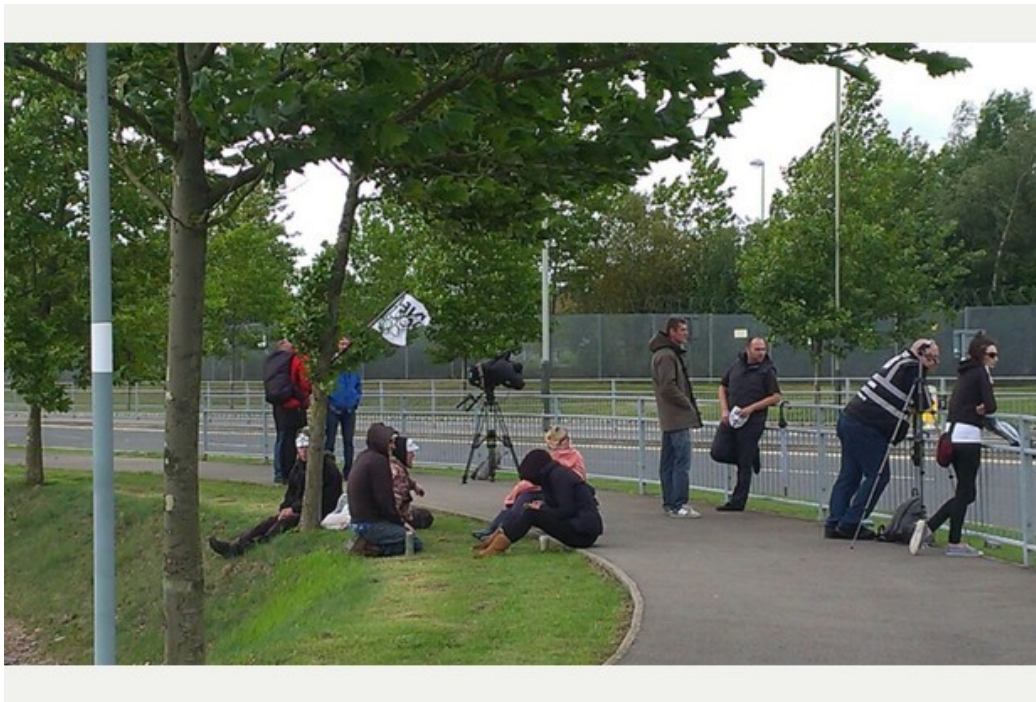
Approaching Trafalgar Square on foot from Victoria train station there were a conspicuous number of police vans parked around Parliament Square which gave the impression that something large enough to require a police presence was happening. This suspicion was confirmed by the presence of more vans parked along Whitehall in a similar manner to the Million Mask March on November 5 the previous year. Arriving at Trafalgar Square, the designated meeting spot for the protest, the reason for this presence became immediately apparent. Trafalgar Square and most of the surrounding area was hosting the annual London Pride LGBT events and marches<sup>635</sup>; Trafalgar Square was cordoned off, every entrance was a gate with security staff, there was a large stage in front of Nelson's Column and food stalls set up around the edges of the square. There were no Anons or Guy Fawkes masks in sight.

Other examples of lacklustre responses to 'calls to action' which highlight Anonymous' post-LulzSec problems as well as an inherent weakness of their organisational structure include a 4-day static protest in August 2014 outside GCHQ in Cheltenham. This was supposed to be a mass protest against government surveillance and in support of our rights to privacy online. The protesters who turned up were outnumbered by the journalists/photographers and police

634 Anonymous Operations, Facebook post, June 24, 2013,  
<https://www.facebook.com/AnonymousOperations/posts/411601958958708>.

635 "London Pride 2013 – in pictures," *The Guardian*, posted June 29, 2013,  
<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/gallery/2013/jun/29/london-pride-in-pictures>.

drawn from Kent, South Wales and the Metropolitan Police forces in response<sup>636</sup>:



The Facebook discussion for the event<sup>637</sup> includes suggestions that the timing of this protest too was poorly-conceived, taking place very close to the planned protests in against the NATO summit in Newport a few days later<sup>638</sup>.

In March 2015 internet news aggregation site The Daily Dot published an article by Hector Monsegur, Sabu himself<sup>639</sup>, an act met with widespread condemnation by many Anonymous mouthpiece Twitter users. The character of Anonymous' reaction beyond this vocal condemnation shows this decline in operational capability and collective will. Rather than announcing a DDOS attack or leaking information about The Daily Dot's staff Anonymous' response was to stop following the site on Twitter<sup>640</sup>:

636 "Low-key GCHQ protest over surveillance case under way," *BBC News*, posted August 29, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-28979524>.

637 "Mass GCHQ Protest 2014," Facebook event, accessed November 20, 2014, [https://www.facebook.com/events/1409207159335021/?active\\_tab=posts](https://www.facebook.com/events/1409207159335021/?active_tab=posts).

638 "Protesters stage anti-Nato march," *BBC News*, posted September 4, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-29063237>.

639 David Gilbert, "Anonymous launches Destroy Daily Dot campaign over Sabu reporting role," *International Business Times*, posted March 10, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/anonymous-launches-destroy-daily-dot-campaign-over-sabu-reporting-role-1491340>.

640 Gilbert, "Anonymous launches Destroy Daily Dot campaign over Sabu reporting role," *International Business Time*.



Towards the end of 2013 statements announcing Operation Throwback circulated on Anonymous-affiliated websites and social media hubs. This operation was supposed to be:

...a carefully planned and executed demonstration of the power of the hive mind. We are encouraging a digital protest against the oppression the governments of the western world are putting on us. Anonymous is reaching out to you, at this moment to take a stand for what is right.

This operation seeks to launch distributed-denial of service (DDoS) attacks against a list of targets viewable in our IRC network. Anonymous will be distributing necessary equipment, intelligence and assistance to all those who wish to join our fleet. The DDoS attacks will be a powerful show of force to take a careful stand in opposition to the crimes against freedom that hold us down with each passing day.

The power of the hive mind will be overwhelming. It will not falter, fail or cease as long as we are together. With you, we can be strong. It's time to prove that we are still here and we have the motivation to strike back. The United States decided to shake our nest, and for that, we will sting back<sup>641</sup>.

Apart from briefly disabling the websites of the American Nazi Party as an apparent prelude to a much bigger campaign Operation Throwback amounted to little more than some brief discussions and PR material circulating on technology/internet news websites<sup>642</sup>. This

641 "Statement to the press and the people of the world OperationThrowback," *Cyberguerrilla*, posted October 28, 2013, <http://web.archive.org/web/20131214102357/https://www.cyberguerrilla.org/blog/?p=16156>.

642 Lorraine Murphy, "Meet #OpThrowback, the 'edgier, more dangerous cousin' of #OpNSA," *The Daily Dot*, posted October 31, 2013, <http://www.dailydot.com/politics/anonymous-operation-throwback-nsa-ddos->

reduction of enthusiasm and capability was worsened by Anonymous' weakness of needing a clear and definable target to align itself in opposition against; a flaw present throughout Anonymous' history since before Project Chanology in 2008. Every major action by Anonymous-identifying activists has been an iteration of the same process, an organised reaction to external stimuli to bring an otherwise disconnected community together whose only common ground is Anonymous' shared visual language. The Habbo Hotel raid in 2006 only took place because of rumours that the administrators were biased towards banning dark-skinned characters circulating around 4chan<sup>643</sup>. The Hal Turner raids in the same year took place because his radio show was coming to an end, providing a quick and easy source of lulz. This process relies on the agency of Anonymous' target(s) to instigate the feedback loop which keeps the inevitable digital entropy and collective boredom at bay. However after LulzSec the fear of infiltration has accelerated both of these processes in a way which Anonymous' operational template has not accounted for.

The Church of Scientology discovered that acknowledging the Streisand Effect and not responding to Anonymous shuts down the feedback mechanism Anonymous needs to maintain operational momentum. This problematic need for a clear enemy to align themselves against becomes visible when Anonymous' smug external visage fails and the fallible, contradictory and vain human beings underneath come into the light of day. In March 2016 Anonymous announced plans to harass Donald Trump in the run-up to his Republican presidential candidate nomination. This quickly dissolved into a back-and-forth of videos and 'press releases' making opposing claims. Anons on one side supported his right to free speech and that whatever Anonymous did would be ineffective<sup>644</sup>. On the other side Anons claimed that Trump's record for racism and hate-speech meant that he was a fair target and unsuitable to be in the White House in 2016<sup>645</sup>.

prism/.

643 "Pool's Closed," Know Your Meme, last modified February 20, 2015, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pools-closed/>.

644 anoncourier, "ANONYMOUS PRESS RELEASE - #OPTRUMP [TERMINATED]," YouTube video, 1:50, posted March 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KE0vMsR87ww>.

645 Justin Streight, "Anonymous Ends Attack on Donald Trump, Declares War on 'System' Instead," *Inquisitr*, posted March 20, 2016, <http://www.inquisitr.com/2908333/anonymous-ends-attack-on-donald-trump-declares-war-on-system-instead/>.



Very few of Anonymous' operations have had as much impact as the aforementioned whistleblowers<sup>646</sup>. There are two examples of Anonymous' activities which have come close; however both of these were accidental. Information made public as part of a large-scale data theft from intelligence company Stratfor in 2011 revealed that the Pakistani intelligence services had known where Osama bin Laden had been hiding for some time<sup>647</sup>. The second came from the previously discussed HBGary Federal attack in the same year. Similarly leaked data contained previously ignored evidence of Chinese corporate espionage. Anonymous leaked volumes of emails as part of their retribution against the security company for its CEO's claims of successfully infiltrating Anonymous. Part of this data included access logs and lists of IP addresses showing where HBGary's servers and email accounts were being accessed from. At the same time as this attack forensic computing company Mandiant had been researching Unit 61398, a secret and state-sponsored Chinese computer espionage unit. Mandiant researchers downloaded the information leaked by Anonymous and found IP addresses matching the addresses they were monitoring for evidence of Unit 61398's existence and their operations to steal US corporate intelligence for the Chinese government<sup>648</sup>.

### The Anonymous Paradox

Anonymous' growth in popularity has made its symbolic language relevant to more grievances and political circumstance. This expansion has in turn provided a wider range of enemies to draw from as inspiration for future operations. The Anonymous identity itself only exists thanks to a series of unpredictable and chaotic circumstances; without the anonymous post on /b/ calling for action against the Church of Scientology it may never have evolved beyond a community of capricious internet trolls on 4chan. The Church of Scientology removed the video of Tom Cruise from YouTube in 2008, when V for Vendetta had soaked into popular culture through the marketing and merchandising of its politicised imagery. As Project Chanology ran out of operational momentum the DDOSing of illegal download sites

646 Gabriella Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous* (United Kingdom: Verso Books, 2015), 312.

647 Damien McElroy, "Stratfor: Osama bin Laden 'was in routine contact with Pakistan's spy agency'", *The Telegraph*, posted February 27, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/al-qaeda/9109457/Stratfor-Osama-bin-Laden-was-in-routine-contact-with-Pakistans-spy-agency.html>

648 Nate Anderson, "How Anonymous accidentally helped expose two Chinese Hackers," *ArsTechnica*, posted February 20, 2013, <http://arstechnica.com/security/2013/02/how-anonymous-accidentally-helped-expose-two-chinese-hackers/>.

by the entertainment industry in 2010 created a new focus of attention and new enemies to re-validate Anonymous' existence. In this way Anonymous is a political and rhetorical chameleon; they can be angry about and protest against anything and everything given sufficient momentum<sup>649</sup>.

Anonymous' physical activities are an excellent way to see this in action. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is hard to get a sense of what protests like the Million Mask Marches are actually about on any level beyond the individual protester. There are placards and slogans denouncing everything from austerity measures, the continuing involvement of the British government in the Middle East to cuts in tax benefits/welfare and environmental issues. This multitude of voices shout in different directions, a hydra of outrage at odds with many of Anonymous' materials and texts which present the image of a collective or hive-mind of ultra-rational and enlightened citizens<sup>650</sup>.

The Million Mask Marches are a microcosm of Anonymous in and of themselves. They are a point of concentration where conversations and political networking, which otherwise take place over the internet, are conducted in condensed physical space and time. Observing these interactions shows that Anonymous' problematic reactionary motivations for political action are the only course of action available. Anonymous' survival paradoxically depends on the continuing existence of its targets, despite the apocalyptic rhetoric and declarations of imminent destruction. These criticisms have been levelled at other decentralised movements which operate along similar lines. The Occupy movement has been praised for raising awareness of inequality and attempting to engage in different forms of collaborative politics through visible urban occupations<sup>651</sup>. However despite this praise there have not been any clear results from the mass occupations of Zuccotti park and other locations around the world, instead Occupy may have had a detrimental effect on the lives of those they claimed to speak on behalf of. By jamming urban centres the Occupy protests restricted or discouraged footfall in areas with restaurants and cafés and other service-based businesses; therefore reducing the

649 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy*, 399.

650 Justus Uitermark, "Complex contention: analyzing power dynamics within Anonymous," *Social Movement Studies*, posted May 16, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14742837.2016.1184136>.

651 Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 10.



tip income for the low-level staff who form part of the '99%' demographic<sup>652</sup>. As with New York Magazine's critical outlining of Anonymous' 'war' targets, criticism of Anonymous along these lines has become more commonplace. Without a clear or cohesive message Anonymous' physical presence and activity makes little outward sense, even to those involved<sup>653</sup>.

Does this then mean that Anonymous is a failure? Does their lack of self-determined agenda compared to conventional politics or lack of impact compared to whistle-blowers mean that Anonymous has no potential for greater things? From the above criticisms it would be easy to say that Anonymous has indeed failed. The majority of their most popular targets have survived the brief but intense glare of Anonymous' attention and emerged unscathed<sup>654</sup>. Propositions like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) have been criticised for changing the rules of the internet in favour of governments and big business however it continues to make progress through legislative and ratification systems around the world<sup>655</sup>. Project Chanology did not remove the Church of Scientology from the internet. Operation Payback/Avenge Assange did not crush the entertainment industries that rely on copyright. Whistle-blowers like Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden remain in political exile or are in prison, as are former Anons like Jeremy Hammond. Regardless of their grand statements of solidarity or bellicose calls for mass action no government has been overthrown as a direct result of Anonymous. The annual 'Million Mask March' protests on November 5 disrupt traffic in city centres and drain the resources of police departments around the world, but is this all they can achieve?

On the surface Anonymous seem ineffective, aimless and puerile. Their cacophony of online and physical noise expresses disenfranchised and often impotent rage in a way that is hard to digest by the general public, the very audience Anonymous needs. Their language and organisational methodology makes them incompatible with conventional politics whereas the

652 Kathy Dong, "Why Occupy Wall Street Isn't Working," *The Huffington Post*, posted July 31, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-dong/why-occupy-wall-street-is\\_b\\_1720886.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-dong/why-occupy-wall-street-is_b_1720886.html).

653 Sam Kriss and Chris Bethell, "London's Million Mask March Was a Weird, Awkward Pantomime," *Vice*, posted November 6, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/million-mask-march-2015-sam-kriss-938>.

654 Feldman, "An Incomplete List of Every Person, Place, and Institution Upon Which Anonymous Has 'Declared War'." *New York Magazine*.

655 Andrew Griffin, "TPP signed: the 'biggest global threat to the internet' agreed, as campaigners warn that secret pact could bring huge new restrictions to the internet," *The Independent*, posted October 5, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/tpp-signed-the-biggest-global-threat-to-the-internet-agreed-as-campaigners-warn-that-secret-pact-a6680321.html>.

Pirate Parties and lobbying groups like the EFF have been making considerable and more accessible political headway. The aforementioned public infighting over the validity of targeting Donald Trump in March 2016 is another example of how this lack of collective unity and cohesion can publicly undermine Anonymous' reputation and legitimacy. There have been calls for Anonymous to adopt some sort of leadership in order to avoid incorrect leaks/information being published as was suspected in the re-launch of OpKKK in late 2015:

...the spread of false information are a result of far too many individuals bringing their bit to the table without a structured head or lead role. An alpha dog capable of keeping the loose hounds in order is the only way to minimize the negatively effective actions taken by some of the weaker links. The potential of stripping the inaccuracies and falsehoods presented by members is high, but only under the circumstance that those members work together and harmonize with a president of some sort...<sup>656</sup>.

There is no chance this would ever work with something like Anonymous. Anonymous grew out of a decentralised and leaderless environment and have enshrined those social conventions as the shared identity has expanded. The point of being anonymous on 4chan and Anonymous out in the wider political world was to implicitly reject such hierarchies. Anyone claiming to be an 'official' Anonymous outlet is either shouted down or ignored. As discussed in the previous chapter Anonymous have been dealing in secrecy and quasi-conspiratorial politics for so long that any attempt at establishing authority would immediately be met with suspicion or rejection.

There are numerous IRC servers, Facebook groups and Twitter accounts where operations are planned and information is shared however the individuals involved disregard personal identity within them<sup>657</sup>. The grand irony of this is that a community which promotes the ideals of anonymity, rejecting the power of corporations or governments conduct their operational plans on some of the largest privately-owned meta-data gathering platforms in the world, yet still consider themselves Anonymous<sup>658</sup>. One of the videos discussed in the previous chapter

656 Adrian Jania, "JANIA: Anonymous hacktivism requires leadership for success," *The Daily Nebraskan*, posted November 12, 2015, [http://www.dailynebraskan.com/opinion/jania-anonymous-hactivism-requires-leadership-for-success/article\\_0fbfcfee-88df-11e5-a0ab-8bbced32e304.html](http://www.dailynebraskan.com/opinion/jania-anonymous-hactivism-requires-leadership-for-success/article_0fbfcfee-88df-11e5-a0ab-8bbced32e304.html).

657 Gabriella Coleman, "Anonymous Has Changed the Way We Think About Anonymity," *Motherboard*, posted November 9, 2015, <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/anonymous-has-changed-the-way-we-think-about-anonymity>.

658 AnonymousBr4sil, Facebook group, accessed April 12, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/AnonymousBr4sil>.

goes to great lengths to explain the differences between 'real' and 'fake' Anonymous social media profiles/accounts<sup>659</sup>. Anonymous has fallen into the trap of relying on fixed online locations which are easy for the governments and corporations they so vehemently oppose to gather their personal information for intelligence or marketing purposes; a predicament similar to Anonymous' adoption of the official Guy Fawkes masks for Project Chanology in early 2008. Not all Anons are unaware of this hypocrisy; a statement posted on the website of Anonymous-affiliated internet radio station AnonUKRadio expresses this in detail:

When something becomes physical it becomes hard to adapt, or control, it begins to make decisions on its own and slowly it can lose its identity. With so many personalities clamouring to be heard with their personal grievances, their individual world views, their need to control and own it for themselves, Anonymous developed a split personality. Fighting itself, its many voices crying to be heard, some louder than others until eventually the idea that formed it became lost, buried so deep down inside that new voices that added themselves to this hulk only heard of it in passing, and some denied it even existed in the first place...

...Since Anonymous has filled the internet with groups, tweets and blogs, it has, like all great movements, drifted into obscurity, you need only check out the Facebook groups or see the arguments on Twitter to see this. Some still drift in thru[sic] the great Temple doors but most drift back out again when they see that the pulpits are empty and the pews are filled with 'Anons' discussing their daily routines or are fighting amongst themselves over who is more 'Anon'<sup>660</sup>.

This statement criticises Anonymous' solidification around social platforms built around verifiable identity as downward spiral into 'egofaggotry'<sup>661</sup> and into believing its own rhetoric without any concept of self-awareness or of the lulz:

Where Anonymous went wrong was creating a church, a temple to dwarf the mightiest temples ever built, this church sprawled across the world, globally straddling the earth like a titan, its doors flung open giving access to all. Not questioning those that entered or even caring whether those that passed under its arches were true to the idea, or understood it. Like a religion it forgot that it was an idea and began to believe its own bullshit, 'The last boss of the Internet' it screamed, 'We are Legion' it chanted. The idea was struggling to be something an idea should never be 'physical'<sup>662</sup>.

659 ANONYMOUS tv. "Fake ANONYMOUS USERS," YouTube video, 11:47, posted September 4, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72ZZUdkRgR8>.

660 "Anonymous R.I.P.," *Anon UK Radio*, posted August 21, 2013, <http://anonukradio.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/anonymous-rip.html>.

661 Claiming personal responsibility for hacks through a consistent online username and otherwise seeking personal fame. As discussed in Chapter 2, these concepts were rejected during the creation of 4chan by Christopher Poole and are seen as anathematic to the core concepts of Anonymous by the remaining 'Old Anons'.

662 "Anonymous R.I.P.," *Anon UK Radio*.

This statement was posted in 2013, two years after the fall of LulzSec and one year after the truth behind how it happened had been made public; the lowest point in Anonymous' history. As discussed in the previous chapter the wider political world had caught on to the severity of Anonymous beyond just the straightforward criminal dimensions of their operations. This eloquent yet pessimistic statement touches on how the Anonymous identity technically survived this dark time in an entropic environment such as the internet<sup>663</sup>. The opening paragraphs suggest that the way Anonymous survived this period turned it into something far removed from what Anonymous had been up until that point:

...many of you reading this are Anons, part of some facebook group, or forum. Tweeting away with your Anonymous nick all the bad things the media don't say. But if you really, truly analysed what it means to be Anonymous you will realize that what you are doing is no different from what a thousand others are doing, others who do not hide behind a nick, or mask. Journalist, Bloggers, Aware Citizens and of course the thousands of legitimate protests groups out there, Greenpeace, Amnesty, Anti-War, Anti-Fracking, Anti-Fascist etc. etc.<sup>664</sup>

This paragraph in particular relates to the above discussion of Anonymous' place among organisations like the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the Pirate Parties but expands it to consider the wider problems of Anonymous' solidification. As was the case with the Anonymous cypcat group Lizard Squad, the internet of today is a very different place to the internet of 2008. There are many other groups and individuals using the same social media platforms to discuss the same topics as many Anons but do so in ways which enable these discussions to interact with mainstream social and political discourse. This further diminished Anonymous' necessity as a nexus of discussion for protests and for general anti-authority sentiment.

As briefly discussed in chapter 1, we can turn to a multitude of theoretical bases as points to view and assess Anonymous. One mentioned therein but not yet explored further is Nietzsche's concept of Ressentiment and the further exploration of it as a function of Post-Anarchism by writers such as Saul Newman. The Anonymous singularity can be understood as a nebula of principally unattached signs and signifiers whose growth in popularity and political gravity has drawn in and absorbed a wide array of orbiting grievances, enemies and targets. Project Chanology was Anonymous' first overt actualisation of Ressentiment, one that brought Anonymous as an idea and a signifier to the wider public's knowledge. However

663 Heather Brooke, *The Revolution Will Be Digitised* (United Kingdom: Windmill Books, 2012), 13.

664 "Anonymous R.I.P.," *Anon UK Radio*.

significant it and the following events that are detailed in this thesis were, without a specific and providential convergence of timing it is possible that the idea of Anonymous as we know it would never have evolved beyond capricious internet trolls; the Church of Scientology removed the Tom Cruise video from the internet at the point where V for Vendetta had sufficiently soaked into popular culture, partly through the marketing and merchandising of its political imagery. As Chanology ran out of operational momentum through the near-inevitable entropy of online attention and the Church of Scientology's heeding/countering of the Streisand Effect, it was the DDOSing of file sharing sites in 2010 that created a new focus of attention and direction, a new enemy and a new target to once again validate Anonymous' position and even existence. The growth in popularity from this surge of activity drew in more and more individuals with their own grievances and issues, popularising more sources of Ressentiment that blended together into a general position of resistance.

These criticisms have been leveled at other decentralised actors and movements with similar attributes and agendas. The Occupy movement has been praised for raising awareness of issues relating to inequality and attempting to engage in different forms of collective and collaborative politics through highly visible urban occupations, however there has not been any clear and visible results from the mass occupations of Zuccotti park and other locations around the world. There are suggestions that Occupy has had a detrimental effect on the lives and conditions of employees in the areas they occupy, who are exactly the demographic they are claiming to speak on behalf of. It is this lack of connection and engagement with the state political structures that is the source of many criticisms for both Anonymous and Occupy; non-state political activist networks which operate in ways that are incompatible with the existing political systems and which will be unable to affect any response or changes in these systems beyond provoking legal and judicial reciprocity in the forms of arrests and increasingly stringent rules and regulations for protests.

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this thesis were, without a specific and providential convergence of timing it is possible that the idea of Anonymous as we know it would never have evolved beyond capricious internet trolls; the Church of Scientology removed the Tom Cruise video from the internet at the point where V for Vendetta had sufficiently soaked into popular culture, partly through the marketing and merchandising of its political imagery. As Chanology ran out of operational momentum through the near-inevitable entropy of online attention and the Church of Scientology's heeding/countering of the Streisand Effect, it was the DDOSing of file sharing sites in 2010 that created a new focus of attention and direction, a new enemy and a new target to once again validate Anonymous' position and even existence. The growth in popularity from this surge of activity drew in more and more individuals with their own grievances and issues, popularising more sources of Ressentiment that blended together into a general position of resistance to what seems like anything and everything.

As a decentralised network of activists operating from a nebulous and harlequin singularity of identity, it is often difficult to grasp the extent of this diversity through simply reading Twitter, Pastebin or IRC. They have been mentioned previously herein, but Anonymous' activities in the physical world are an excellent arena in which to clearly see this multiplicity of Ressentiment in action. Every year on November 5th Anonymous-identifying or affiliated individuals gather around the world to participate in the 'Million Mask March', a global series of events ranging in scale and scope and along a multitude of regional or international causes. As discussed in the previous chapter, from personal experience of successive years of protests in London and as someone who has studied and followed Anonymous for years, let alone a casual observer or passer-by, it is hard to get any general sense of what these protests are actually about. There are placards and slogans denouncing everything from austerity measures, the continuing involvement of the British government in the Middle East, cuts in tax benefits/welfare, environmental issues and many more. This wide array of causes is united only in their position against an external target and their use of the signifiers and signs of Anonymous; a multitude of voices shouting in different directions yet along the same trajectory. This nexus of Ressentiment is at odds with many of the materials and texts that emerge from the Anonymous singularity, especially those aimed at the public and/or a particular target which present an image of a unified collective or hive-mind of activists. As with New York Magazine's critical outlining of Anonymous' 'war' targets, this problem has



become an increasingly widespread criticism of Anonymous, that without a clear or cohesive message this physical presence and activity makes little outward sense, even to the participants.

The Million Mask Marches are a sub-singularity of Anonymous in and of themselves, a point of concentration where what are normally distributed and often ephemeral conversations and political networking over the internet take place in condensed and compressed physical space and time-frames. Observing and interacting with the protesters in this way serves to highlight just how problematic Ressentiment is as a source of motivation for political action. In whatever way the observer classifies Anonymous; a collective pseudonym or nom-de-guerre, an inverted panopticon or a rabble of internet keyboard warriors, all of them rely on anonymity as a central pillar; a social construct and community practice that was established at the beginning of Anonymous' history. This rejection of the concept of identity as a form of political and social protest transforms into the assuming of a new collective identity based on an open and floating signifier which can be co-opted freely as a bridge to connect a new cause or targeted grievance with the existing machinery of ire and retribution that, according to both Nietzsche and Newman, drives Ressentiment forward, however hollow such a process may be. This process has led to the only type of political framework available; a collective politics of Ressentiment that defines its own existence through necessitating the very things it seeks to overthrow or nullify in order to validate its own existence. This further serves to undermine the legitimacy or value of Anonymous by their engaging in the same processes of exclusion that they decry.

From the point of view of early to mid-2013 when this research was beginning in earnest this assessment of Anonymous as a purely reflexive outpouring of Ressentiment rather than a non-state actor with pre-determined agency would have been an entirely accurate obituary. It was fortunate for Anonymous that a new and infinitely more straightforward target in the form of ISIS would draw them into a new period of activity and organisation, providing a wellspring of Ressentiment for them to draw upon.

### Anonymous versus ISIS: a war of perception

Anonymous needs enemies who they can define themselves in opposition to; this provides motivation and alignment for an otherwise nebulous cloud of activists who have no common ground beyond Anonymous' symbolic language. As discussed in chapter 6 other examples of political groups using methods similar to Anonymous began to appear across the Middle East around the same time as this slump in Anonymous' own operational activity continued in 2013. The Syrian Electronic Army was hijacking Twitter accounts to devastating if short-term effect<sup>665</sup> however this failed to provide the stimulus that Anonymous needed. Instead Anonymous found its perfect nemesis in the Islamic State/ISIS insurgency which had been rapidly growing throughout 2013.

What made a mostly physical and kinetic insurgency like ISIS relevant to Anonymous was that in addition to taking physical territory across Iraq and Syria they were gaining the attention of the world's news and social media through an extensive use of Twitter<sup>666</sup> and by creating provocative videos showing prisoner executions and the iconoclastic destruction of ancient Persian artefacts/museum pieces.

As ISIS' physical presence has expanded across the Middle East and it has claimed responsibility for an increasing number of terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States, Anonymous has found a new lease of life; repeatedly 'declaring war' on ISIS' social media presence in 2014, a campaign which has been criticised for potentially endangering Iraqi or Syrian Anons as well as anyone else who got involved<sup>667</sup>. Throughout 2015 ISIS' online operations expanded beyond simply using Twitter as a recruitment tool and began to resemble Anonymous' own past methods. In January 2015 ISIS hackers took over the Twitter account of US Central Command and making posts declaring love for ISIS<sup>668</sup>. In August 2015 the

665 Peter Foster, "'Bogus' AP tweet about explosion at the White House wipes billions off US markets," *The Telegraph*, posted April 23, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/markets/10013768/Bogus-AP-tweet-about-explosion-at-the-White-House-wipes-billions-off-US-markets.html>.

666 J. M. Berger, "How ISIS Games Twitter," *The Atlantic*, posted June 16, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-iraq-twitter-social-media-strategy/372856/>.

667 David Gilbert, "Anonymous Criticised For Declaring 'Full Scale Cyber War' Against Isis," *International Business Times*, posted September 1, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/anonymous-criticised-declaring-full-scale-cyber-war-against-islamic-state-1463427>.

668 Spencer Ackerman, "US Central Command Twitter account hacked to read 'I love you Isis'," *The Guardian*, posted January 12, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jan/12/us-central-command-twitter-account-hacked-isis-cyber->

personal information of 1400 US military and government personnel was publicised along with statements motivating anyone to find and attack them<sup>669</sup>.

Anonymous' campaigns to shut down ISIS' online and social media presences took the form of website breaches, Twitter account shut-downs and information dumps on ISIS recruiters between bragging and posturing over Anonymous' eventual victory. In response to ISIS-affiliated gunmen opening fire on a concert audience in Paris in November 2015 Anonymous released a guide on how anyone could hack ISIS<sup>670</sup>. Intercepted communications from ISIS-associated social media accounts included basic instructions to prevent being targeted as well as calling Anonymous 'idiots'<sup>671</sup>. The effects of such actions are unclear<sup>672</sup>; how can a mostly internet-based political group have any real effect on opponents such as ISIS, for whom online recruiting is only part of a larger kinetic insurgency on the ground<sup>673</sup>? However bombastic Anonymous' claims about their success may have been, there was an increasing body of evidence which suggested the social media accounts being targeted by Anonymous were not connected to ISIS at all<sup>674</sup>. By contrast in July 2016 the US government claimed to have reduced ISIS' online presence by 45% through counter-messaging and propaganda campaigns of their own<sup>675</sup>.

An unusual outcome of Anonymous' efforts was a brief example of tacit praise from the British government and a short period of similar praise from elements of the British press. When asked about the role of activist groups like Anonymous in countering ISIS' online

attack.

669 Michael Safi, "Isis 'hacking division' releases details of 1,400 Americans and urges attacks," *The Guardian*, posted August 13, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/13/isis-hacking-division-releases-details-of-1400-americans-and-urges-attacks>.

670 Thomas Gorton, "Anonymous releases guide on how to hack Isis," *Dazed*, posted November 18, 2015, <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/28484/1/anonymous-releases-guide-on-how-to-hack-isis>.

671 Chloe Farand, "Anonymous 'Op Isis': Isis supporters hit back by publishing set of anti-hack guidelines," *The Independent*, posted November 21, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/anonymous-op-isis-isis-hits-back-by-publishing-sets-of-anti-hack-guidelines-a6743111.html>.

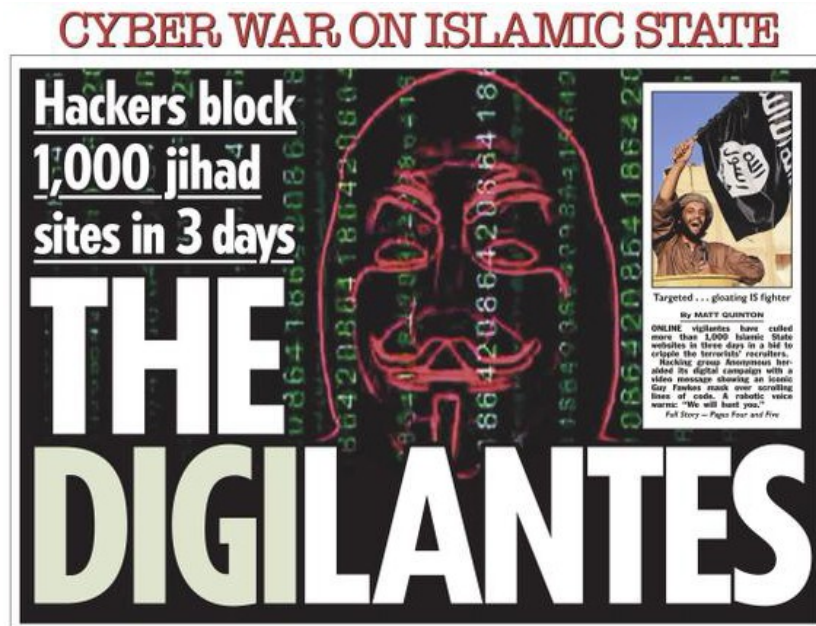
672 Ari Levy and Anita Balakrishnan, "What can Anonymous really do to ISIS?," *CNBC*, posted November 18, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/18/what-can-anonymous-really-do-to-isis.html>.

673 Lorenzo Franceschi-Bicchieri, "Anonymous Has Little to Show For Its Year-Long Fight Against ISIS," *Motherboard*, posted November 18, 2015, <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/anonymous-has-little-to-show-for-its-year-long-fight-against-isis>.

674 Russel Brandom, "The Anonymous 'war on ISIS' is already falling apart," *The Verge*, posted November 23, 2015, <http://www.theverge.com/2015/11/23/9782330/anonymous-war-on-isis-hacktivism-terrorism>.

675 Claire Reilly, "ISIS influence on the decline as terrorists lose Twitter battles," *Cnet*, posted July 11, 2016, <http://www.cnet.com/uk/news/isis-influence-twitter-on-the-decline-us-state-department/>.

presence in November 2015 Home Office security minister John Hayes expressed that he was '...grateful for any of those who are engaged in the battle against this kind of wickedness'<sup>676</sup>. Earlier in the same year The Sun praised Anonymous' efforts with a front page spread<sup>677</sup>:



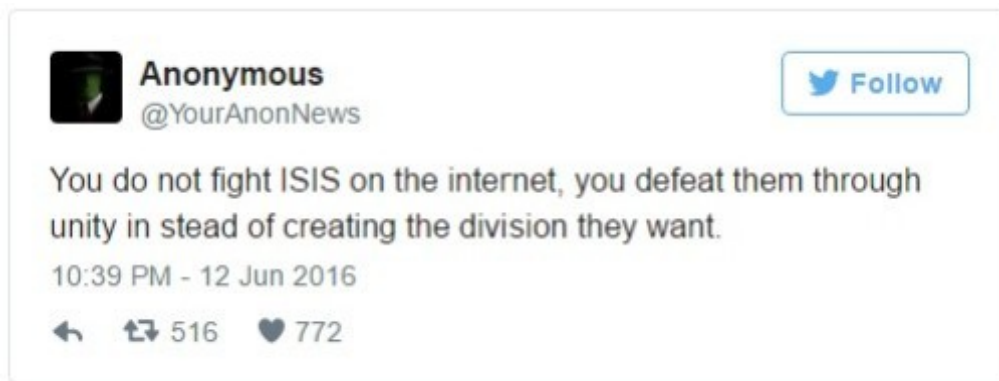
ISIS are Anonymous' perfect nemesis; an aggressive extremist organisation who are universally reviled by every Western government. Launching attacks against their online presence is relatively-risk free and has political cache among Western audiences. Are Anonymous likely to achieve their stated goals of eradicating ISIS from the internet? Given the current conditions of their previous 'war' targets<sup>678</sup> this is unlikely. Throughout this 'war' on ISIS there have been signs of the digital entropy which has undermined all of Anonymous' operations. After a lone ISIS-affiliated gunman opened fire on an Orlando nightclub in June 2016 one the most-followed Anonymous-affiliated Twitter accounts YourAnonNews posted<sup>679</sup>:

676 Priyanka Mogul, "Isis: Security Minister John Hayes praises Anonymous Op Paris attack on Islamic State," *International Business Times*, posted November 24, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-security-minister-john-hayes-praises-anonymous-op-paris-attack-islamic-state-1530332>.

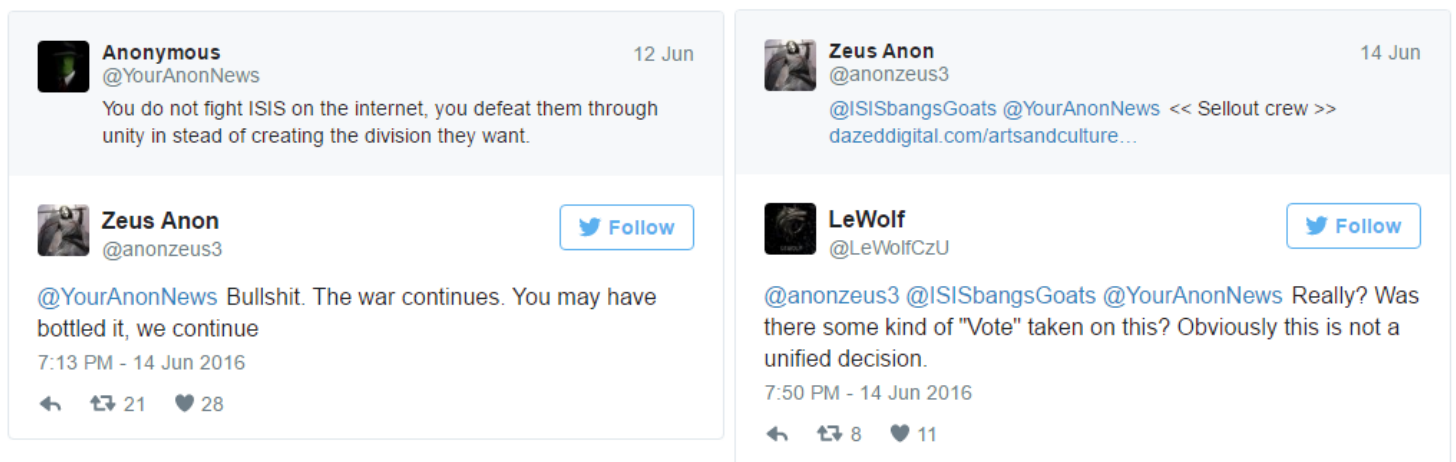
677 "The Sun everyday," *Kiosko*, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://en.kiosko.net/uk/2015-02-11/np/sun.html>.

678 Feldman, "An Incomplete List of Every Person, Place, and Institution Upon Which Anonymous Has 'Declared War'." *New York Magazine*.

679 Jesse Hirsch, "After Orlando, Anonymous Vows To Leave ISIS Alone," *Good*, posted June 14, 2016, <https://www.good.is/articles/anonymous-says-peace>.



Although YourAnonNews is one of the most popular and followed Anonymous-affiliated Twitter accounts this sentiment was not met with universal praise or agreement<sup>680</sup>:



The potential effect of such a ‘war’ continuing against a target whose main efforts are physical and kinetic such as ISIS is questionable. Anonymous’ statements of intent to remove ISIS from the internet and triple-figure statistics of blocked ‘jihadi sites’ on newspaper front pages look good in principle however these ‘losses’ are an easily replaceable and tertiary element of ISIS’ wider war of representation and simulation<sup>681</sup>. ISIS uses social media as a signal boost within an already receptive community, recruiting more members from other countries in the region such as Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia than from Europe<sup>682</sup>. ISIS-affiliated groups like the African Islamic insurgent group Boko Haram have boosted their recruitment

680 Hirsch, “After Orlando, Anonymous Vows To Leave ISIS Alone,” *Good*.

681 Chris Copeland, “Will Anonymous’s War on ISIS Have Any Effect?” *Newsweek*, posted November 24, 2015, <http://europe.newsweek.com/will-anonymouss-war-isis-have-any-effect-397778>.

682 Uri Friedman, “An American in ISIS’s Retweet Army,” *The Atlantic*, posted August 29, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/an-american-in-isis-retweet-army/379208/>.

efforts through battlefield success and taking territory in countries with limited social media or internet penetration<sup>683</sup>. Anonymous' war on ISIS has exacerbated one of Anonymous' most stubborn flaws. Anonymous needs external stimuli to react to and a nemesis to define themselves in opposition to. Therefore the continued existence of ISIS, the nebulous wars in the Middle East and the execution of high-casualty terrorist attacks is in Anonymous' best interests; a serious and hypocritical contradiction which undermines Anonymous' operations to an extent not seen in their previous operations against less overtly violent enemies.

As discussed in chapters 6 and 7 Anonymous' post-LulzSec operations have been subject to more scrutiny by external observers and more scepticism from within as Anonymous' reputation has been diluted by aimless and toothless campaigns, a reduction in operational capability and its solidification on identity-based social networks. In November 2015 Kuwaiti security firm Cyberkov explored how Anonymous were conducting their anti-ISIS operations and what tools/methods they were using. According to Cyberkov the majority of Anonymous' activity consisted of searching Twitter for keywords to identify what they believe are ISIS-affiliated recruiters and supporters. The names of these accounts are then compiled and published online with encouragement for readers to report them to Twitter<sup>684</sup>. This is a further example of Anonymous' flawed but only methodological practices undermining their intent. For all their rhetoric about removing ISIS from the internet these practices are essentially passive-aggressive internet vigilantism; pointing at who they think are the bad guys so that others can take action against them. This approach has come under scrutiny from the wider internet/technology media as being ineffective<sup>685</sup> however the most damning criticism has come from Twitter themselves. An employee who did not want to be identified told the Daily Dot in March 2016:

683 Kathy Gilsinan, "Is ISIS's Social-Media Power Exaggerated?" *The Atlantic*, posted February 23, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/is-isis-social-media-power-exaggerated/385726/>.

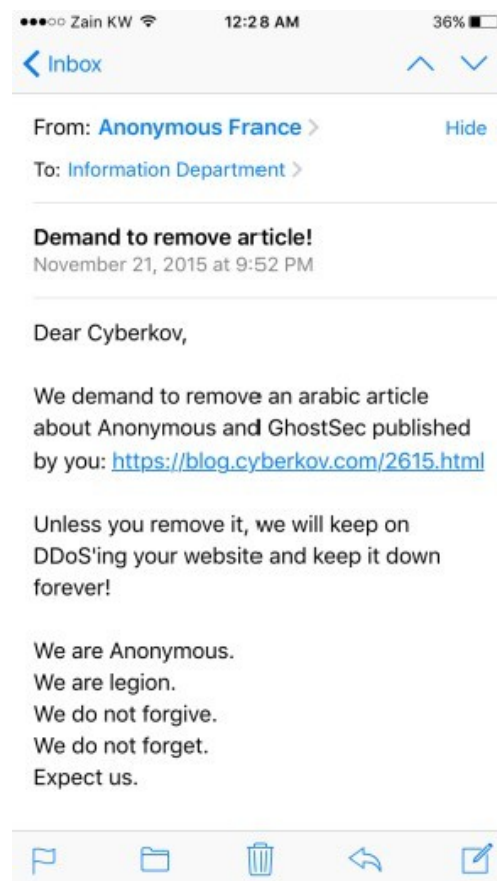
684 "Anonymous From Inception to Corruption," *Cyberkov*, posted November 24, 2015, <https://blog.cyberkov.com/2711.html>.

685 Jeff Stone, "Anonymous' ISIS Operation Twitter Lists Are 'Wildly Inaccurate' And Causing Headaches At Twitter," *International Business Times*, posted November 23, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/anonymous-isis-operation-twitter-lists-are-wildly-inaccurate-causing-headaches-2196044>.



Users flag content for us through our standard reporting channels, we review their reports manually, and take action if the content violates our rules... We don't review anonymous lists posted online, but third party reviews have found them to be wildly inaccurate and full of academics and journalists<sup>686</sup>.

The owners of the platform which Anonymous are trawling for ISIS recruiters/propagandists disregarding their efforts is a significant problem for Anonymous' image and their justifications for such a flawed process. On July 20 2016 Cyberkov's Twitter account posted a message stating that, like the coup in Turkey, Anonymous would fail, sharing a translated article detailing the history of Anonymous and their alleged connections to police/intelligence forces when tracking down ISIS Twitter accounts. The end of the article included an apparent blackmail message from Anonymous France dating from December 2015 which stated that unless this article was removed Cyberkov's website would be taken offline indefinitely<sup>687</sup>:



686 Dell Cameron, "Twitter: Anonymous's lists of alleged ISIS accounts are 'wildly inaccurate'," *The Daily Dot*, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.dailydot.com/layer8/twitter-isnt-reading-anonymous-list-isis-accounts/>.

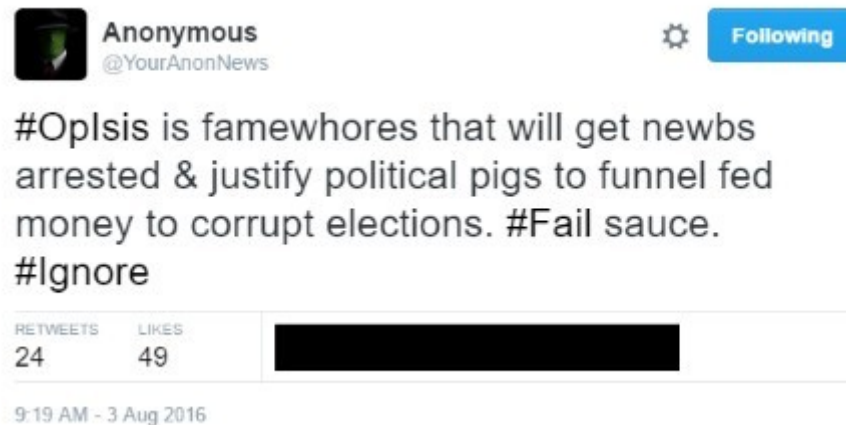
687 "Anonymous From Inception to Corruption," *Cyberkov*, posted November 24, 2015, <https://blog.cyberkov.com/2711.html>.

These related examples show the weaknesses in Anonymous' political ethos and tactical methodologies which have been present throughout their history and have been brought to light before. Even the contextual circumstances for Anonymous' involvement in this case are not without precedent; the Arab Spring was a period of real political and social upheaval which had a real impact on the lives of millions of people across North Africa and the Middle East. However Anonymous' operations in response to the Arab Spring was more proactive, offering ways to circumvent internet censorship and use dial-up/fax lines to communicate to the wider world. The direct effects of these actions were either impossible to measure or short-lived and were as reactionary as the rest of Anonymous' operations. There was a form of proactive agency behind them which gave the impression that Anonymous were taking direct action in response to a developing and serious political and humanitarian crisis. The Anons who were targeting ISIS, an equally real political/humanitarian crisis themselves, 5 years later were making the same statements of intent but the associated actions were weak in comparison.

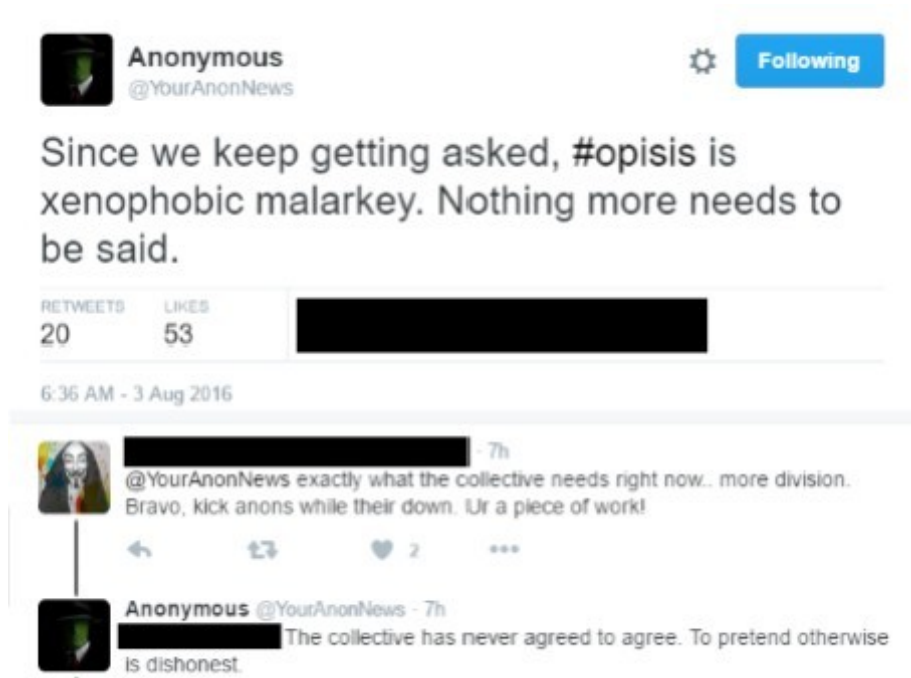
Anonymous' operations have never matched up to their maximalist rhetoric, however in the past this was balanced by the acid-tongued and 4chan-forged humour built on multiple layers of irony and double-speak. It was this combination which made Anonymous appealing to the internet audience, fascinating to the media and taken seriously by their opponents. 'Old Anonymous' would probably have found the un-ironic suggestion that 'moralfags' like the Anonymous of today could defeat a combined territorial insurgency and international terrorist group like ISIS by reporting anyone who they think is a recruiter/promoter to Twitter hilarious. This combination of serious talk with lacklustre action perpetuates the image of Anonymous as indecisive and ineffective, undermining their image as a cabal of elite and dangerous hackers but with a capricious or ironic edge which, in addition to their capability to go beyond blogging and re-tweeting about the ills of the world, helped create this image in the first place.

The above threats against Cyberkov are an example of another of Anonymous' problems when it comes to maintaining their public image. Anyone can call themselves Anonymous, use the symbolic language of the Guy Fawkes mask and the question mark-headed figure and make public demands or statements of intent regardless of their compatibility the views of

other Anons or the latent shared values cultivated throughout Anonymous' history. This is something that certainly some Anons are not unaware of. In August 2016 discussion on Twitter regarding what Anonymous' can do against ISIS in real terms and the potential collateral damage presented a biting critique of both these issues<sup>688</sup>:



This provocative statement opened up further discussion on the nature of Anonymous itself. The below discussion is a clash between the collaborative and cause-oriented ideals of the 'new' Anonymous with the capricious and chaotic ideals of the 'old Anonymous'<sup>689</sup>:



688 Anonymous (@YourAnonNews), Twitter post, August 3, 2016, 9:19a.m., <https://twitter.com/YourAnonNews/status/760751976594407424>.

689 Anonymous (@YourAnonNews), Twitter post, August 3, 2016, 6:36a.m., <https://twitter.com/YourAnonNews/status/760710872985636864>.

This discussion over the status of Anonymous' anti-ISIS operations is a microcosm of the previously discussed schism between the 'old' and 'new' Anonymous. The statements by YourAnonNews' denouncing the concept that Anonymous has ever agreed about anything, as well as their green-skinned, blank-faced profile picture, match the cultural values and imagery of pre-Chanology 'old Anonymous'. Their respondent's claims about the need for collective unity, criticism of mocking Anonymous' operations and using the Guy Fawkes mask are equally representative of the 'new' Anonymous and all the negative connotations that come with it; cause-oriented and lacking the cynical humour which helped the Anonymous identity stand out in the first place<sup>690</sup>.

These disagreements, Twitter arguments and contradictory statements are a microcosm of the kind of contradictory behaviours which have contributed to Anonymous' image problem. The modern Anonymous appears to be incapable of fulfilling its grandiose threats of retaliation and justice; paralysed by unsolvable ideological divisions and a dilution of the capricious spirit which helped establish the Anonymous identity in the first place. In July 2016, four months after Anonymous' public and embarrassing dispute over the validity of attacking Donald Trump, one of the most prominent Anonymous-affiliated Twitter accounts proposed a 'day of solidarity' in support of the Black Lives Matter movement; announcing attacks against police departments across the United States linked to shootings over the previous year<sup>691</sup>:

690 "Green Anon / Old Anonymous," *Know Your Meme*. last modified May 16, 2015, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/green-anon-old-anonymous>.

691 Sarah Lynch, Mor Turgeman and Amit Weiss, "Anonymous Declares 'Day Of Action' In Solidarity With BLM," *Vocativ*, posted July 10, 2016, <http://www.vocativ.com/338766/anonymous-declares-day-of-action-in-solidarity-with-blm/>.



As well as these general statements there were specific threats to the St. Anthony and the Baton Rouge Police Departments which claimed that:

The entire global collective of Anonymous is outraged at these vicious murders. The time has come to draw a line in the sand and say enough is enough. We are infuriated as we watch day after day, another human, murdered, because an irresponsible, corrupt system allows free reign to cops that continuously abuse their power.

...we've already launched attacks on your virtual infrastructure...We are prepared to release every single piece of evidence that will expose your corruption and blatant disregard for human life.

On Friday, July 15th, we will all flood the streets at strategic locations in order to maximize our voice. The locations and times will be located in the description below. Tell your family, tell your friends. We will change the world together. Our freedom depends on it<sup>692</sup>.

The language of this statement suggests that every single Anon around the world is personally outraged at the frequency of police shootings. It is unlikely that the regionally-focused Anonymous groups in Peru, Taiwan or South Africa discussed in chapter 6 were as directly affected as the author wants the intended audiences of this statement to believe. This statement is another example of the trap which Anonymous exists in and was created for them

692 TheAnonMessage, "EMERGENCY RESPONSE: JULY 15TH - DAY OF ACTION (#FridayOfSolidarity)," YouTube video, 5:32, posted July 9, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEWtsSffvQg>.

as far back as the Message to Scientology in January 2008. The dramatic text of the Message to Scientology included such phrasing as:

Over the years, we have been watching you... Anonymous has therefore decided that your organization should be destroyed; for the good of your followers, for the good of mankind and for our own enjoyment we shall proceed to expel you from the Internet...you will not prevail forever against the angry masses of the body politic. Your choice of methods, your hypocrisy, and the general artlessness of your organization have sounded its death knell...<sup>693</sup>

With the benefits of hindsight and further historical analysis of what Anonymous was and who they were at the time, the notion that they had been watching the Church of Scientology for years is demonstrably false. the proto-Anonymous community only began to care about the extant long-running controversies around Scientology a few weeks earlier with the legal back-and-forth over the leaked Tom Cruise video. The language in the Message to Scientology is similar to the statements made by the Anonymous of 2016 discussed above, however the changing attitude of new Anonymous towards un-ironic ‘moralfaggotry’ has removed the important counter-balancing force of the lulz from the creation process for such materials.

However seriously the Anons involved in creating the text and images for this day of solidarity were, the message was taken seriously by its intended targets. The official Facebook page for St Louis’ military airbase Scott Air Force Base posted a warning message on July 14 2016 for personnel to stay away from St Louis’ famous gateway arch:

Please be advised that the Air Force Office of Special Investigations has posted a safety warning not to be at the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, at 6 p.m. on Friday, July 15 due to potential protests and criminal activity. Please be safe and avoid this area during that time<sup>694</sup>.

This status was updated later the same day with a calmer but equally cautionary message:

693 ChurchOfScientology, “Message to Scientology,” YouTube video, 2:03, posted January 21, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCbKv9yiLiQ>.

694 “Scott Air Force Base posts warning over possible ‘Day of Rage’ in St. Louis,” *Fox2Now*, last modified July 14, 2016, <http://fox2now.com/2016/07/14/scott-air-force-base-posts-warning-over-day-of-rage-protest-in-st-louis/>.



There have been several reports of a nationwide "Day of Rage" on 15 July declared by the hacker collective known as "Anonymous". The St. Louis Arch was identified as a potential protest site on Friday, July 15 at 6 p.m. Although these rumors do not appear to be credible, both the National Park Service at the Gateway Arch and the St. Louis Metropolitan Police have been made aware. Recommend all SAFB personnel continue to monitor the news for potential protests or criminal activity in that area during this time. Please be safe and aware of your surroundings, and please report any information that may suggest a credible concern to the authorities<sup>695</sup>.

The St Louis Metropolitan Police Department posted equally cautious messages to Facebook:

We are aware of circulating social media posts regarding a 'Day of Rage' protest event scheduled for this evening, Friday, July 15. The department has been aware of this event for some time. The 'Day of Rage' event is a yearly event held in most major cities across the country. The event was held last year in St. Louis and a small number of individuals attended, with no issues or arrests made. As always, the department is prepared to respond to any possible unrest that may arise<sup>696</sup>.

The response from other Anonymous-affiliated Twitter accounts was less enthusiastic and included a statement by YourAnonNews debunking its authenticity<sup>697</sup>:



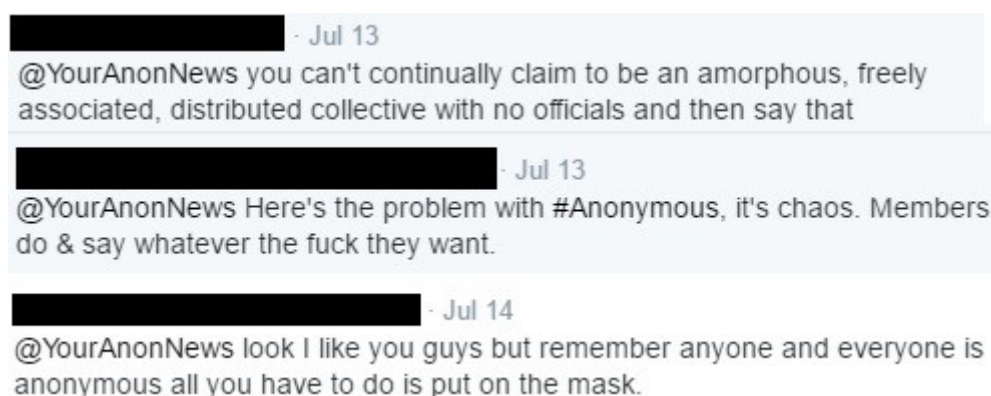
This is a further example of Anonymous' internal problems of credibility and a complete lack of 'quality control' for outward-facing messages. Anyone can adopt a Guy Fawkes mask

695 Scott Air Force Base, Facebook post, July 14, 2016,  
<https://www.facebook.com/ScottAirForceBase/posts/1110949105619596>.

696 St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department (OFFICIAL), Facebook post, July 15, 2016,  
<https://www.facebook.com/SaintLouisMetropolitanPoliceDepartment/posts/1272321282777947>.

697 Anonymous (@YourAnonNews), Twitter post, July 13, 2016, 9:36p.m.,  
<https://twitter.com/YourAnonNews/status/753327383697031168>.

profile picture and Anonymous-related name on Twitter and begin making statements regardless of their accuracy or timeliness. The Anonymous-authored ‘day of rage’ as a response to police shootings mentioned by the Twitter account TheAnonMessage dates back to 2014 and was being re-used through this new account by persons unknown<sup>698</sup>. The above message by YourAnonNews is an example of Anonymous’ existence in an unregulated and inescapable trap of unverifiable claims. The same question of YourAnonNews’ legitimacy comes up several times in response to their claims of false information or the non-existence of the ‘Anonymous day of rage’<sup>699</sup>:



YourAnonNews is one of a handful of popular nodes of organisation and information distribution for Anonymous, but as the respondents above have highlighted, such ‘namefagging’ is the antithesis of Anonymous’ most commonly shared ideals and guiding principles. These public disputes highlight some of Anonymous’ core weaknesses and how those who identify with it operate as a political actor. These statements all orbit around one problematic question; if Anonymous is truly a leaderless and horizontal collective with no formalised processes of membership where anyone and everyone can be anonymous and Anonymous, what gives YourAnonNews the right to judge the authenticity of an operation planned by anyone else?

As with the majority of Anonymous’ previous operations and regardless of its authenticity in the eyes of YourAnonNews, the ‘day of rage’ was a reaction to events whose media focus and prevalence on social media was growing independently of Anonymous involvement. The Black Lives Matter movement is itself the culmination of years of racial and social tension

698 “Nationwide Day of Rage (Aug 21) Schedule and Locations,” *Pastebin*, posted August 19, 2014, <http://pastebin.com/HQCaxcdU>.

699 Anonymous (@YourAnonNews), Twitter post, July 13, 2016, 9:36p.m., <https://twitter.com/YourAnonNews/status/753327383697031168>.

between African American communities and police forces; tensions that became a bigger public issue via the 2014 protests/riots in Missouri and the acquittal of George Zimmerman for shooting black teenager Trayvon Martin in 2012. Anonymous was slow to get involved in this cause, only mobilising once the social and political fallout were already prevalent in the mainstream news and social media spaces. This is the same pattern that has repeated throughout Anonymous' history; the Church of Scientology had been sporadically protested for decades prior to the Tom Cruise video being removed from YouTube in early 2008. The dynastic governments of North Africa caught up in the Arab Spring had been censoring free speech and controlling their respective online media infrastructures for decades. It wasn't until the sustained chain reaction of popular protests made global headlines over an extended period of time that Anonymous got involved.

The disagreement regarding the authenticity of the 'day of rage' is one of many examples where the open nature of Anonymous turns against itself. The idea of Anonymous is a multifaceted collection of symbols whose adaptability has diluted the capricious intentions of 'old Anonymous'. The reactionary nature of Anonymous' political mechanisms means that there is no actionable or consistent message to spread as a recognisable political platform from which to build. This is more problematic when Anonymous' public discourse is concerned with who is sufficiently Anonymous to publicise an operation. These two fallacies lie at the heart of Anonymous and, unless we see a dramatic normalisation of Anonymous, they will remain for the foreseeable future.

## Conclusion

Despite the grandiose claims and the temporary disruptive effects of physical protests like the Million Mask March, Anonymous' political power and capability are limited to the internet. The decline of serious operations in favour of passively signal-boosting other causes, online petitioning and un-following websites on Twitter is a far cry from the law-breaking hacking sprees and bellicose operations which made Anonymous Internet and real-world famous. This is made all the more apparent when Anonymous involve themselves in physically dangerous and complicated situations such as the Arab Spring and the rise of ISIS; the latter augmenting and escalating long-standing criticisms over Anonymous' operational effectiveness and political relevance.

As well as the underlying schools and trends of political thought that power and make use of it, this relationship is far from a new or recent development, pre-dating the internet and even electricity itself. Anonymous did not invent website/Twitter hijacking or DDOS attacks however their consistent use of these tools has shown that such disruptive PR campaigns can serve a purpose. The 'hacker wars' between Anonymous and ISIS have helped change part of the wider perception of Anonymous from dangerous hackers to digital privateers. Despite being free from legal reciprocity while they harass a morally uncomplicated, legally safe and politically acceptable enemy, the flaws which have undermined Anonymous' operations in the past have continued to plague them regardless of the scale or severity of their targets<sup>700</sup>.

The Anonymous identity has survived through a form of untethered chameleon adaptability which has perpetuated the language and imagery of Anonymous for at least 8 years, keeping itself alive by constantly re framing itself through opposition and resistance. This has kept the name of Anonymous alive however the political cynicism and bravado, the only constant motivational factors throughout its history, had changed Anonymous; a "...leaderless collective of a few had become a leaderless collective of thousands, floundering about, organising protests in the name of an idea very few of them understood. Arguments erupted and 'Anons' doxed 'Anons' for petty personal grievances"<sup>701</sup>.

700 Franceschi-Bicchierai, "Anonymous Has Little to Show For Its Year-Long Fight Against ISIS." *Motherboard*.

701 "Anonymous R.I.P," *Anon UK Radio*, posted August 21, 2013, <http://anonukradio.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/anonymous-rip.html>.

It is this survivability which we must use to measure Anonymous' worth; that something like Anonymous could be created, grow and survive in an environment like the internet for 8 years. However as this chapter has shown, a major caveat to this is that the nature of this survival is unclear. Despite having morally-straightforward targets like ISIS available to them, Anonymous' weak response is indicative of how much the Anonymous identity has diluted, becoming another voice on social media among many who decry the evils of the world. Anonymous' capability and willingness to act on these causes made them into middle-men for the disenfranchised; a platform guaranteeing exposure and solidarity among a larger constituency. Anonymous' enigmatic, decentralised and fundamentally tautological means that, like for the confused tourists and commuters crossing Trafalgar Square on a rainy November evening, it is a confusing tangle of strange imagery and political messaging which does not translate very well outside itself.

What does this mean for the future of Anonymous and the Anonymous identity? What can we learn from this example of technologically-facilitated political hacker-activism? The next and final chapter will bring together the discussion from this and the previous chapters to answer these questions, present some final thoughts and potential future avenues for research and offer an interpretation of who and what Anonymous is, taking the evidence and analysis from this thesis into account.

## Chapter Nine – Conclusion

Individuals who speak for Anonymous or try to vainly define Anonymous are always wrong. Even if they are right, they are still wrong. Only Anonymous can speak for itself, for the collective knows itself and the entity they embody. Anyone who claims that Anonymous is anything but a contradiction is wrong. They are misinformed and should seek knowledge before speaking. No one speaks for Anonymous, not even Anonymous<sup>702</sup>.

For a man to wrap himself up and draw his hat over his face, and then fall upon people who are walking about without any disguise–this is not the part of a gentleman, it is the part of a scoundrel and a knave<sup>703</sup>.

If the first quote is true then Anonymous cannot be explained from an external perspective but neither can it be defined from within. The masked visage Anonymous presents to the world is a refusal of such codifications, 'No one speaks for Anonymous, not even Anonymous'.

Anonymous' developmental environment fostered shared values rejecting personal identity to enable open and level human communication. However as has been shown throughout this research, this process has faltered as Anonymous grew in popularity and audacity. The quasi-romantic fiction which Anonymous built came under duress through competing personality politics and a wider schism over Anonymous' direction as capricious trolls or serious political activists. From their expansion outside of their inward-facing internet squabbling through Project Chanology in 2008 Anonymous were able to present themselves as a masked hive, an incarnation of 'the people' made flesh in the streets of our cities or striking out of the shadows of the internet. However this expansion brought them into conflict with targets capable of responding through prosecution and infiltration rather than ineptly fuelling the operations being launched against them.

This research has documented Anonymous' growth from a small online community into a social communication hub for disenfranchised individuals and protest movements around the world. As well as looking at historical and political precedents to outline and help understand how and why Anonymous is so difficult to comprehend, their history has been explored further through novel perspectives; as Anonymous' relationship with popular culture as a political language and the broader history of mass communication technologies as vectors for

702 *The Anonymous Book* (The Imaginary Book Co., 2013), 182.

703 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Art of Literature*, translated by T. Bailey Saunders (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893), 100.



political subversion over the last 500 years. Through examining these connected aspects of Anonymous this thesis has highlighted the difficulty of defining such a tautological and deliberately elusive community. This community has changed significantly since this research began in 2012. The revelation of Sabu/Hector Monsegur's role as an informant in the aftermath of LulzSec's destruction in 2011<sup>704</sup> sapped the enthusiasm from the most engaged and active Anons leaving only the vocal but passive majority recycling the same slogans to each other<sup>705</sup>. From 2012 to 2014 Anonymous lacked a target of a significantly visible nature which would draw them together. This research was almost a post-mortem of a fascinating political process which had reached the end of its life. Anonymous' reactionary nature means it is almost impossible to predict when or against whom its symbolic language will be used to escalate a new controversy or cause. Their operations against the KKK, Donald Trump and ISIS are problematic in their own ways, however they illustrate Anonymous' constant potential to re-engage and re-define themselves as a reflection of current events.

The tens of thousands of words in this research cannot completely represent what the idea of Anonymous is or who Anonymous are. Anonymous grew from a small but active sub-section of 4chan, one of the most important internet communication hubs at a time when the internet itself was growing into something we can recognise today. Although Anonymous left 4chan these cultural traits have been carried forward and expanded upon, broadcast to an audience wider than the introspective and nihilistic 4chan community they came from. Spurred on by ongoing and popular campaigns against targets such as the Church of Scientology, the entertainment industries and governments around the world, Anonymous expanded into wider fields of political activism through circumstance and providence. This often sporadic momentum was maintained by a feedback loop of media attention and publicity which reinforced their image as a mysterious and enigmatic hacker hive-mind, internet bogeymen or digital Vikings; dangerous raiders who would strike out of nowhere and disappear with their stolen data and much more valuable lulz.

704 Steve Fishman, "“Hello, I Am Sabu...”," *New York Magazine*, posted June 3, 2012, <http://nymag.com/news/features/lulzsec-sabu-2012-6/>.

705 "Anonymous R.I.P.," *Anon UK Radio*, posted August 21, 2013, <http://anonukradio.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/anonymous-rip.html>.

This research has analysed Anonymous' history from their formative period as internet trolls in the mid-2000s through to their open and aggressive campaigns against ISIS in 2016. This research has built on the works of writers who have also extensively investigated Anonymous throughout their history such as Gabriella Coleman, Parmy Olson and Cole Stryker, drawing upon contemporary events to provide an up-to-date picture of Anonymous as well as laying the groundwork for tracking Anonymous' future operations and development. As discussed in chapter 5 a political group carries the cultural and social traits from its formative environment. In Anonymous' case this was an anarchic and meritocratic online environment where the most valuable social currency and building-blocks of its cultural norms were the remixing of popular culture. Anonymous were not the first to use the compressed cultural meaning behind the image and identity of Guy Fawkes for political or capricious purposes, however their multi-layered re-appropriation of the Guy Fawkes mask explains much about Anonymous' structure and methods.

The mask's availability as commercial merchandise contributed to its utilisation by the Project Chanology protesters. This had the secondary effect of concentrating a previously diluted symbol of radical and regicidal politics. Anonymous took the image of Guy Fawkes further away from Adorno's Culture Industry by making physical bootleg versions; freeing the purchaser from directly funding companies whose copyright protection practices have brought them into Anonymous' cross-hairs throughout their history. The creation of Anonymous-branded merchandise such as the bootleg masks discussed in chapter 5 has contributed to internal accusations of profiteering by 'fake' Anons<sup>706</sup>.

Anonymous uses pop-culture imagery as a rhetorical common denominator which transmits political messages instantly through associating them with ongoing events. This imagery delivers condensed layers of meaning faster and in a more accessible way to Anonymous' constituency and the wider public than government reports or ministerial speeches. Chapter 5 explored this process of pop-culture appropriation as a founding pillar of Anonymous' identity construction. During this formative period the imagery of Anonymous was in a state of flux, however their symbolic language has settled into a consistent visual lexicon. The Guy Fawkes mask and the suited figure/UN-style seal continue to be invoked as political shorthand and a

706 ANONYMOUS tv, "Fake ANONYMOUS USERS," YouTube video, 11:47, posted September 4, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72ZZUdkRgR8>.

point of commonality for a spectrum of of activists and their respective causes. This shared symbolism enables otherwise disconnected groups and reactionary causes to connect with each other through a common affiliation to Anonymous. This common affiliation means that the many causes which fall under Anonymous' purview are magnified through their own feedback loop. However since around 2010 this process has wound down, matching the overall decline in Anonymous' popularity and notoriety for the simple reason that Anonymous' puerile discourse and hollow threats are less interesting to the media than they were in 2008-2010.

This reduction of Anonymous' novelty has relegated reporting on their operations to niche areas of technology/internet news. Coupled with the growing voices and more accessible organisations which campaign along similar lines, this has weakened the feedback loop of publicity which Anonymous needs to work together. Anonymous is not as unified or harmonious as they present themselves in their outward-facing materials and public image. Anonymous survives through the invocation of its name and the display of its associated imagery, a process which accelerates through the conduct of popular operations and the subsequent media coverage to provide the necessary motivational feedback for operations which rarely 'succeed'. After the post-LulzSec slump Anonymous found a new target in ISIS, but as discussed in the last chapter even this has not been the turning point which rejuvenated Anonymous to their former capability and notoriety. ISIS relies on 'playing the villain'; inviting Western kinetic and political responses to justify their own narrative of being under attack by Western imperialism. ISIS' online presence is as decentralised as Anonymous themselves, reporting Twitter accounts through allegedly ham-fisted search aggregation is unlikely to have a negative effect on ISIS while bringing Anonymous' own capability into question<sup>707</sup>.

Anonymous' anti-ISIS operations have unintentionally shown their human side. Under the mask they are still people who disagree, argue and are fundamentally fallible. As with the Church of Scientology the Anonymous identity has been demystified through a string of embarrassing public disagreements and faux-pas. The bickering over operations against ISIS and Donald Trump's presidential campaign has highlighted Anonymous' fallibility, a factor

707 "Anonymous From Inception to Corruption," *Cyberkov*, posted November 24, 2015, <https://blog.cyberkov.com/2711.html>.

which is at odds with the image they present to the outside world. As discussed in the last chapter there is an increasingly open and critical discussion of Anonymous taking place in the same media industries that once covered their early operations in exhaustive detail<sup>708</sup>. This discussion questions Anonymous as a political actor, exposing this disconnect between their apocalyptic rhetoric and the actual effects the associated DDOS attacks or doxxings have on their targets.

A side effect of Anonymous' growing popularity and media attention throughout its history has been an inverse dilution of the very ideas which attracted people to Anonymous in the first place. Firstly, it is important to remember the internet of the mid-2000s and the internet of today are very different places. Wikipedia was slowly growing but had not become as prevalent as it is today. Twitter had just launched and Facebook was in the final stages of usurping MySpace as the most populous social media platform. In this environment Anonymous' dynamic and vibrant persona was both confusing and enthralling to the personality-driven media industry<sup>709</sup>.

On today's internet Anonymous are no longer novel or interesting enough for the media to continue feeding them with lulz-worthy coverage equivalent to the 'hackers on steroids'/'internet hate machine' piece from 2007<sup>710</sup>. Internet-facilitated crime is now a constant factor of personal and corporate life<sup>711</sup>, a factor which reduces the individual impact and attention paid to Anonymous' actions and activities. Anonymous' 'press releases' on Twitter and Facebook continue to make damning accusations of immoral/illegal activity retaliatory threats however they no longer stand out among the social media churn of non-Anonymous affiliated activists, journalists, academics and everyone else debating the same issues themselves.

708 Brian Feldman, "An Incomplete List of Every Person, Place, and Institution Upon Which Anonymous Has 'Declared War'," *New York Magazine*, posted March 15, 2016, <http://nymag.com/selectall/2016/03/everything-upon-which-anonymous-has-declared-war.html>.

709 Gabriella Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous* (United Kingdom: Verso Books, 2015), 50.

710 LOL MONEY, "Anonymous on FOX11," YouTube video, 4:17, posted July 27, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNO6G4ApJQY>.

711 "Crime figures: 'Five million' fraud cases in past year," *BBC News*, posted October 15, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34538183>.

Anonymous continue to announce their attacks and echo already-leaked information but without any attention beyond token coverage from the IT/technology press these attacks quickly run out of momentum. As discussed in chapter 6 the aforementioned cracks in the mask of Anonymous which have shown us their fallibility have been widened through the arrest and prosecution of Anons around the world. From their real beginning in 2008 through Project Chanology through Operation Payback/Avenge Assange in 2010 Anonymous seemed to be invincible; a cabal of internet ghosts who would strike without warning. The rise and fall of LulzSec in 2011 had a debilitating effect on the cohesiveness of an already atomised and increasingly vulnerable group.

Sourced from Arthur Schopenhauer's attack on anonymised literary critique, the second quote at the start of this chapter is equally prescient when discussing Anonymous. Anonymous displays long-standing shared cultural traits of scoundrel and knave-like behaviours, however these have faded since 2011 and have been replaced with comparatively weaker conventional protest politics.

The discussion of Anonymous in this research has raised a number of important historical and political parallels, weaving them together to provide an innovative analysis of Anonymous beyond that which is found in the small field of 'Anonymous Studies'. What this wider approach to understanding Anonymous has shown is that the political dimensions of mass communication technologies and our interaction with them for political purposes are not a recent development. Technologies like the printing press, electric telegraph and satellite television have all been used as political tools for the destabilisation or reinforcement of power narratives. Martin Luther's publication of the '95 Theses' denounced the Catholic Church's accumulation of wealth and power through the financial and ephemeral servitude of the people. William Tyndale and Nicholas Culpeper sought to end the artificial linguistic scarcity of the Bible and medical texts by translating them for everyone to access on some level. Although separated by hundreds of years and global shifts in economic, political and religious power, Anonymous' rhetoric and outward-facing materials draw on similar themes and use similar language for their own ends. Furthermore as we move forward in time the analogies and comparisons become easier to reify; the issues of information privacy, access to confidential data and the battle between code-makers and code-breakers discussed and dealt

with in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in relation to the electric telegraph are ones that we recognise and wrestle with today. It is within this trend of tension between competing personal and authoritative narratives and the contextual landscape of accelerating and broadening communications technologies that Anonymous operates and gains political, intellectual and social ground.

#### Anonymous – should we continue to expect them?

So what can we make of Anonymous, should we continue to expect the legion? Anonymous is a fascinating tautological political actor that defies the media's need for figureheads and quotable sound-bites which makes them all the more appealing at the same time<sup>712</sup>.

Anonymous' symbolic language allows a spectrum of activists to draw on a support network that otherwise would give them no common ground beyond being angry about something and/or disenfranchised. The symbols of the Guy Fawkes mask and question mark-headed figure also provide a visible badge indicating the wearer's identification with Anonymous' values of anonymity, whether worn in person or on one's Twitter/Facebook account. It is this self-attribution of solidarity with Anonymous which make attempts at applying a definitive analytical framework to them so difficult.

Anonymous' elusiveness is further compounded by how the Anonymous identity is constructed through a constant reactionary process of collective alignment. Anonymous needs an enemy to define themselves against, casting themselves as the 'good guys' by the simple virtue of not being their target. This is a fundamentally flawed and self-defeating paradox. As discussed in the previous chapter at Anonymous' core is a constant need for external sources of stimulation and collective reactionary alignment. This reactionary process provides a direction for an otherwise atomised internet which does not have the physical inter-personal connection which drives drives more ethno/geographically driven movements. This has been a constant throughout Anonymous' lifespan, first visible to the wider world during Project Chanology in 2008 and expanding through Operation Payback in 2010. As a result of these hybrid political dramas/media circuses Anonymous' popularity rapidly expanded, bringing a wider range of activists with their own causes and concerns into Anonymous' collective awareness.

712 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy*, 50.



Without the Church of Scientology removing the Tom Cruise video from YouTube there would have been no post on 4chan calling the population of /b/ to arms, no mass protests around the world and no Anonymous as we know them today. This need for an enemy who Anonymous can define themselves in opposition to has the additional negative effect of reinforcing the existence said enemies and whatever controversy stirred Anonymous into life. This means it is in Anonymous' best interests to never actually succeed. As soon as there is no struggle, no motivational cause or no reason to cooperate then any social cohesion built through such structures collapses. This is visible in Anonymous' headline attacks during Operation Payback/Avenge Assange, operations whose impetus came from alleged DDOSing of file-sharing websites by companies associated with the major entertainment/music/film industries. The freezing of Wikileaks' revenue streams through Paypal etc. in response to a series of embarrassing leaks and revelations was a case of fortunate timing, an act which revitalised a flagging operation with no clear or measurable goals other than 'payback'.

Anonymous' actions in support of the Arab Spring the following year only began once this wave of popular uprisings and protests was already making headlines regardless of the decades of internet censorship, government-controlled media outlets and repression of dissidents beforehand. Such things did not make the mainstream news and popular conscience and lacked the critical mass to fuel a DDOS campaign or operations by Anonymous. LulzSec learned their skills and co-ordination through operations against the Tunisian government, launching their own 50-day hacking spree later in 2011. LulzSec may be one of the only examples of a truly resonant, popular and notorious campaign driven by the motivations of those involved, returning to the proto-Anonymous roots of harassing targets for the lulz and simply because they could, rather than as a reflexive response to an external stimulus.

Not every Anonymous-identifying individual or group operates in such a reflexive capacity; there have been a number of hash-tagged operations without a direct source or stimulation or are responses to far more generalised sources of outrage and indignation. In April 2016 the hacker group Ghost Squad, in collaboration with Anonymous, shut down several Klu Klux Klan-affiliated websites<sup>713</sup> as part of a sporadic campaign going back to at least 2014. These

713 Ryan De Souza, "Anonymous Ghost Squad's DDOS Attack Shuts Down KKK Website," *Hackread*, posted April 24, 2016, <https://www.hackread.com/anonymous-ghost-squad-ddos-on-kkk-website/>.

attacks made brief stories on technology and hacker news sites but their general claims of racism and fascism rather than on any particular event, gave the media nothing to go on and those involved little reason to continue the operation. 'Operation Icarus' was launched in 2016 as a wide-reaching campaign DDOSing the websites of banks around the world including Bosnia, Kenya and Panama<sup>714</sup> to:

...represent the voice of the voiceless. We are uniting to make a stand. The central banks which were attacked in recent days were attacked to remind people that the biggest threat we face to an open and free society is the banks. The bankers are the problem and OpIcarus is the solution<sup>715</sup>.

Reuters quoted an unnamed official from a targeted Greek bank who stated that “The attack lasted for a few minutes and was successfully tackled by the bank's security systems. The only thing that was affected by the denial-of-service attack was our web site”<sup>716</sup>. As well as reinforcing how ineffective DDOS attacks are as an offensive political tool, these two operations highlight Anonymous’ weakness in needing a defined and paradoxically unbeatable enemy rather than operating on a sense of general unhappiness with the world. Both of these sought to overcome or destroy their targets, painting the attackers as rational and just: 'making a stand', 'OpIcarus is the solution'. As discussed in chapter 8, the sporadic and apparently brief attacks as part of OpIcarus pale in comparison to the revelations in the financial documents published in the Panama Papers leak. The generalised and non-specific statements as above against 'the bankers' accelerates the already rapid-onset entropy such campaigns face; both OpKKK and OpIcarus have sporadically attacked their targets and claimed numerous digital scalps, however their respective targets continue to operate despite the apocalyptic rhetoric promising measures to the contrary.

There are examples of this kind of ineffective operation based on a general disenfranchisement taking the principles discussed above and throughout this research to the

714 Waqas Amir, “OpIcarus Finds More Targets as Banks in Panama, Bosnia and Kenya Go Offline,” *Hackread*, posted May 8, 2016, <https://www.hackread.com/opicarus-ddos-banking-sites/>.

715 Waqas Amir, “OpIcarus: Hacktivists Shut Down Central Bank of Cyprus with DDOS Attack,” *Hackread*, posted May 5, 2016, <https://www.hackread.com/opicarus-hacktivists-ddos-central-bank-of-cyprus/>.

716 George Georgiopoulos, “Anonymous attack Greek central bank, warns others,” *Reuters*, posted May 4, 2016, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-greece-cenbank-cyber-idUKKCN0XV0RR>.

extreme. On July 24 2016 The ‘AnonGhost’ group announced Operation USA:

This Message Is Addressed To US Government:

You have failed as expected.

For many years, we have witnessed your unjust laws.

You have abused human rights, creating Wars, Financial Crisis, bombings, arresting innocent people, assassinating, using media propaganda to spread your lies, to justify your corrupt act... as you continue to push for full domination and control of our lifes[sic].

We will fight back!

You can’t stop the movement anymore, you can try to stop us but we will always find a way to resist.

And there are many of us out there, more than you think.

People who refuse to stop believing.

People who refuse to be governed by a bunch of organized criminals.

We are AnonGhost.

We are Everywhere

You should’ve Expected Us!

#OpUSA engaged<sup>717</sup>.

A video posted to YouTube expressed these sentiments in a typically Anonymous manner. Styled like a film trailer it opens with the phrases ‘AnonGhost Production Proudly Presents...’ and shows footage taken from various films and speeches by Barack Obama, all against a stirring orchestral soundtrack<sup>718</sup>. The above statement and video were the sole output of OpUSA. This toothless example of an Anonymous operation was met with openly critical comments from Anonymous-identifying Twitter users themselves<sup>719</sup>:



717 “AnonGhost Announces #OpUSA – Issues Warning To Government,” *Anon Intel Group*, posted July 24, 2016, <http://www.anonintelgroup.com/2016/07/24/anonghost-announces-opusa-issues-warning-to-government/>.

718 AnonGhost, “#OpUSA by AnonGhost [Official Video],” YouTube video, 2:48, posted April 26, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojTt-CSJLpQ>.

719 Anonymous (@tararics), Twitter post, July 24, 2016, 6:39p.m., <https://twitter.com/tararics/status/757268893178167296>.

If we return again to the rainy November evening in central London this lack of direction becomes visible in a way the protesters involved did not intend. Like an inverted Pandora's Box their banners and placards, with varying degrees of artistic effort and capability, denounce every source of grievance in the world; environmental concerns, animal rights, anti-banking/capitalism all the way to conspiracy theorists and Wikileaks supporters<sup>720</sup>:



This overt display of intense and personal resentment creates a sense of collective indignation that welcomes all present to add their grievances to it. As the daylight fades and the Million Mask March gets under way the crowds chant louder, calmly blocking Whitehall on their way to the Houses of Parliament. It is hard to not get carried along by the anger at the political structures of society, at every injustice and wrongdoing by 'the 1%' as the chanting and banners defy the weather, the police and the encroaching night. In this moment it is easy to see the appeal of Anonymous; it provides a shared platform to air one's grievances in a crowd of the equally disenfranchised<sup>721</sup>. This generalised dissatisfaction winds itself up until you are taken away by it, convinced that anything is possible and that Anonymous will make it happen for anyone and everyone. With experience of multiple Million Mask Marches and of researching Anonymous themselves it is easier to detach oneself from this swell of resentment to have a more cynical reading of the day's events. Standing on Parliament Square watching the masked crowd jeering, waving signs and shouting their grievances at an empty Palace of Westminster, the flaws in what Anonymous is and what it offers becomes clear in this microcosm of Anonymous as a whole. The symbolic language of Anonymous has brought these people together who otherwise would not have been aware of each other. Like the

720 Collins, Ben "Anonymous Protesters November 5<sup>th</sup>." 2014. JPEG file.

721 Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower; Spy*, 399.

conspiracy theories and theorists discussed in the previous chapter, Anonymous provides purpose and meaning to people who feel like their grievances are too large to process on their own. Anonymous provides agency for the marginalised and politically excluded, creating a focal point for their energy and providing ample opportunity to discharge their frustration regardless of direction or impact. Anonymous' operations may rile the IT security departments of their targets and draw the attention of the police however any measurable effects are short-lived or have no impact on whatever it was the operation was opposing<sup>722</sup>. This flaw is hard to grasp when navigating Anonymous' press releases, Twitter accounts and YouTube videos, however it becomes clear when played out in person. The crowds pour their indignation out into the street, the sky and into the faces of the police officers forming lines behind the barricades. Their calls for revolution, the end to war, the end of financial institutions controlling our lives echo off the walls of the empty Houses of Parliament which rebukes their passionate accusations with indifferent, stony silence

Anonymous' operations against ISIS have briefly reinvigorated Anonymous' social media presence and operational unity. By their very existence ISIS are a morally justifiable, legally safe and, more importantly enduring enemy. Crucially ISIS have either yet to learn the lessons of Scientology regarding the use of silence to grind Anonymous' operational momentum to a halt, or those involved in ISIS' social media engagement simply don't care; in December 2015 a statement attributed to ISIS declared that they were 'owners of the virtual world'<sup>723</sup>. Such a belligerent enemy should have provided Anonymous with an infinite source of lulz and operational momentum, however overt criticism of Anonymous' methods and widespread burnout through lack of visible progress has undermined both of these previously potent stimuli. ISIS will not be removed from the internet or physically defeated by Anonymous' alone; Anonymous can only benefit from ISIS' continued existence, however emphatic their organisation against them states otherwise<sup>724</sup>:

722 Feldman, "An Incomplete List of Every Person, Place, and Institution Upon Which Anonymous Has 'Declared War'," *New York Magazine*.

723 Pamela Engel, "ISIS is 'trying to taunt' Anonymous with a new statement on the hackers' declaration of 'war'," *Business Insider*, posted November 18, 2015, <http://uk.businessinsider.com/isis-anonymous-statement-2015-11>.

724 "Anonymous From Inception to Corruption," *Cyberkov*, posted November 24, 2015, <https://blog.cyberkov.com/2711.html>.

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# How You Can Help

Instead of sitting idle in the channel or lurking around and doing nothing, you can benefit greatly from the different tools and guides that have been provided to you. Your contribution means a lot and we encourage you to partake in all of the Op's activities if you can, the more the merrier.

There are plenty of ways and places to get started and that is where the guides come into play.

NoobGuide – aimed at everyone who wants to get started in the world of hacking, you should be able to understand it fully and there's nothing hard.  
 >>> <https://ghostbin.com/paste/jrr89>

Reporter – it is a very simple guide that explains how to launch a reporter bot against a list of twitter account IDs which is also provided inside.  
 >>> <https://ghostbin.com/paste/vt5zz>

Searcher – another piece of cake, explaining how you can help us find more ISIS websites/pages/information in relation to anything beneficial to us.  
 >>> <https://ghostbin.com/paste/uwbxh>

By now there should be plenty of work to keep you occupied so get going. If you wish to submit anything of value, place your findings on ghostbin.com and share the link to one of the channel operators and we can talk about what to do next.

Despite the futility of Anonymous' anti-ISIS campaigns their reflexive nature means that such flashpoints of spontaneous activity are always possible, even if the majority of their operation videos have little measurable effect. As discussed in the previous chapter, the efforts of groups like BinarySec who find Twitter accounts and reporting ISIS-related websites<sup>725</sup>. Taking down the Twitter accounts of suspected ISIS promoters is a noble idea, but without achievable goals it is unlikely that such levels of widespread enthusiasm will last, especially when such efforts are not taken seriously by Twitter or anyone outside of Anonymous, including ISIS.

Anonymous' esoteric origins and complex tautological structure make accessing or relating to them difficult. The idea of Anonymous is built from the bottom up; anyone can apply its symbolic language to their own political grievances. This openness has created a hydra which lacks the cohesion to consistently move in any given direction. It is easy to write off Anonymous as an offshoot of the Internet's short-term memory; an artefact from a strata of practically prehistoric internet culture. The barrier between those 'in the know' about Anonymous and those who are not can only be bridged through their publicised materials. In the early days of Anonymous these videos, documents and images were as much theatre

725 Catalin Cimpanu, "Meet One of the Anonymous Hackers Bombarding ISIS Websites with DDoS Attacks," *Softpedia*, posted July 22, 2016, <http://news.softpedia.com/news/meet-one-of-the-anonymous-hackers-bombarding-isis-websites-with-ddos-attacks-506544.shtml>.



recruitment tools or reinforcements of Anonymous' beliefs. However the Anonymous of 2016 is a far cry from the Anonymous of 2008-2011. What were the calling cards of virtual highwaymen have become corroded through the repeated entropy of short-lived operations, arrests and a lack of visible success. Operations such as 'OpAfrica' from June 2016 promised that "many corrupt dealings would be exposed to the rest of the world. Stay with us. Expect us"<sup>726</sup>. When compared to significant leaks such as the Panama Papers, whistle-blowers like Edward Snowden and the swing of greater world events, does anyone outside Anonymous' constituency of Twitter accounts and YouTube channels care about or respond to Anonymous anymore?

This research has posed many answers to the equally myriad questions of who/what the Anonymous identity is and who those identifying with its shared signifiers and imagery are. As iterated at the start of this research, it is impossible to apply a Barthesian 'final signified' to Anonymous in all their forms in the space provided herein or among the direct and secondary/tertiary sources used to elaborate on their socio-political mechanisms. This is because such groups as Anonymous, despite their symbiotic need for an audience as well as the reciprocity of spectacle and artifice, do not exist to be interesting case-studies or ammunition for scholarly debate<sup>727</sup> and Anonymous are no exception to this. Their shared ideological notion of outwardly repudiating identity and conventional organisational structure, while at the same time building a compound network of increasingly secretive and closed organisational cells<sup>728</sup> makes building a holistic picture of everyone who identifies as Anonymous, in whatever capacity, a difficult but not impossible task. As discussed in the first chapter this has been conducted through a variety of sociological and statistical means, however this research has taken a different approach necessitated by the unique limitations and mitigating circumstances described in the same chapter. As such, who are Anonymous?

Before continuing, I believe it is important to reiterate that much of whatever Anonymous is or whoever they are is not original or novel in itself; from their origins as part of the vanguard of emerging internet culture in the mid-2000s to their symbiotic relationship with causes and

726 Amando Flavio, "Anonymous Strikes Again in Kenya Against Police Brutality, Leaks Data From National Oil Firm," *Anon HQ*, posted June 4, 2016, <http://anonhq.com/anonymous-strikes-kenya-police-brutality-leaks-data-national-oil-firm/>.

727 David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland:AK Press, 2009), viii

728 Gabriella Coleman, *Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous* (United Kingdom: Verso Books, 2015), 106.

protests outside themselves. This includes their appropriation of a wide range of political lexicons, choosing language and phrasing which will cause the biggest effect on their targets and generate the most publicity for said causes but also, crucially for themselves.

Since their ramping-up of operational capability and public exposure through Project Chanology, Anonymous' purview has expanded to cover a broad range of themes including information freedom, resisting the encroachment of corporate/governmental control into the Internet, protesting censorship, countering internet restrictions and acting as a force multiplier for broader social movements such as Occupy and Black Lives Matter; many of which have been discussed throughout this research. There are of course many more causes worthy of championing, many of which have been going on for longer than even some of the 'old Anonymous' have been alive. They may have been ignored altogether or simply not received sufficient mainstream media/social media attention to make Anonymous' subsequent activities worth covering.

This apparently arbitrary approach to their operational direction is partly due to the lack of centralised authority dictating organisational direction, but there is a common thread among Anonymous' campaigns, that of fighting for the underdog in any given situation and regardless of how appropriate such a moniker is for the involved parties. The case of Anonymous' 'war' with ISIS is a prime example of this duality; on the one hand Anonymous have called for the destruction of western capitalism, threatened to remove western governments from the internet as well as instigate mass uprisings and revolutions. On the other hand Anonymous comes to the defence of the same countries and governments when under ideological or physical threat from ISIS, while at the same time condemning Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory and almost annual launching of DDOS attacks and Twitter hijacks around Holocaust Memorial Day in the name of the Palestinian people they support. In this sense Anonymous cannot seem to help themselves side with the 'lesser' party in any conflict or controversy, regardless of how contradictory or duplicitous such courses of action may be.

In this way Anonymous is a collective embodiment of Nietzsche's criticisms of *Ressentiment* as an ideological or political motivation; defining themselves through opposition and casting themselves as whatever their target of choice is not. This thread is visible throughout all of Anonymous' major operations as well as the more secondary campaigns; Project Chanology was launched to stand up for YouTube which by 2008 was part of Google, one of the biggest information/media companies in the world and is difficult to consider an underdog in any context. Operation Payback/Avenge Assange was launched against the media industry for attacking illegal download sites and switched to defending Julian Assange from the machinations of the US and British governments. Their actions during the Arab Spring were to support the emerging national protest movements across North Africa in the face of their respective militaristic and information-controlling regimes. This anti-elitist philosophy seems to be one of the few almost universally agreed-upon tenets of Anonymous; they act against anyone in a position of power or who is exerting their power. Although this began by intervening in cases involving the Internet or information access, Anonymous' explosion in popularity during 2008-2011 has expanded this purview through the assimilation of the shared grievances brought into the shared identity by each self-identifying participant. As discussed throughout this research such expansion can be seen as a potential cause of Anonymous' undoing; the influx of 'moralfags' drowning out the vanguard 'old Anons' in a wave of serious protest rhetoric with none of the self-awareness which made Anonymous the 'last boss of the internet' in the first place.

This anti-elitism is, as with many other aspects of Anonymous, also open to a certain degree of duplicity and hypocrisy which is best experienced through looking at and listening to the differences between the technically-skilled vanguard of hacker crews/cells such as LulzSec and the crowds who attend Anonymous' protest events in person. The elaborate and eloquent political rhetoric of Anonymous' videos; made by those with the time, money and/or access to technical resources, use complex political language has a visible effect on the attitude and enthusiastically verbalised positions held by those marching/protesting in the streets. Cited by David Graeber, Karl Mannheim suggests that:

...not only do the truly oppressed tend not to engage in sustained revolt, their mode of imagining social alternatives tends to be absolute and millenarian...the truly marginal tended to favor a kind of ecstatic vision of sudden and total rupture<sup>729</sup>.

This attitude is clearly visible in the demands for revolution, the downfall of the government and vaguely-alluded to but insufficiently-described ‘freedom’ and is a characteristic Anonymous shares with other protest/resistance movements which espouse new or innovative forms of democracy through claims alone<sup>730</sup>.

This dilution of visibility and message in the public sphere has been discussed already but it worth repeating and further considering in relation to the equal dilution of Anonymous’ ‘brand’; not just the disparity between the technically-capable ‘elites’ and the much larger body of disenfranchised or marginalised people who have adopted Anonymous as a platform to air their broader grievances as a vehicle of convenience. The masked hordes at events like the Million Mask Marches, all vigorously wording their problems to anyone and no-one, are an embodiment of several of the fundamental fallacies at the heart of what Anonymous is and what those who identify as such do.

This ventriloquist politics has the positive effect of bringing Anonymous to life for both the participants and their targets/audience<sup>731</sup>, however they broadly follow a similar thematic spectrum which ranges from restorative justice regarding a particular issue to outright overthrowing the government and destroying the state in the names of freedom and justice, united by a universally compatible dislike of something or someone else. This is not to say that these throngs of protesters and the elite cabals of hackers are necessarily polar opposites of each other or that the latter is somehow ‘better’ than the former. Instead, the tone and character of such online and offline statements, disregarding the apocalyptic but ultimately empty demands for revolution and the destruction of the state, fall into both the trap of Ressentiment discussed previously and what George Sorel described in 1908 as a fundamental weakness of strikes, protests and other such mass actions, that:

729 Graeber, 245.

730 Ibid, 11.

731 Anastasia Kavada, “Creating the collective: social media, the Occupy Movement and its constitution as a collective actor.” *Information, Communication and Society* 18, no. 8 (2015), 881.

...even when a strike or labor action really does challenge the state's monopoly on violence...strikes are not really revolutionary because ordinarily, a strike aims to win concessions on wages, hours, or conditions that the state will then guarantee and, ultimately, enforce. One is, therefore, not challenging state violence but trying to enlist it for one's own side.<sup>732</sup>

This problem extends across the majority of Anonymous' actions throughout their history, with the notable exception of LulzSec. Anonymous' campaigns/operations are either launched with the aim of restoring the world to a former set of circumstances by attempting to pressure the undoing of a particular law, legislation of action by the authorities, or they attach themselves to the underdog/'weaker' party in any given conflict, especially if it is one that has gained a snowball of mainstream media coverage.

As discussed in the previous chapter, this open-ended, anti-authoritarian stance towards notional concepts of identity, membership or leadership has protected Anonymous and worked in their favour to a degree, however it has also had the effect of diluting the Anonymous 'brand'. This is not to say that the outward appearance of Anonymous has been anything other than an anarchic collage of memes/pop culture imagery and a bizarre inversion of mainstream news media, however the emphasis on ideological/symbolic incentives driven by the apocalyptic phrasing of their public materials has led to an inherently divisive and fractious system of dis-organisation. Anonymous' kaleidoscopic visual language, fragmented notional view of the self and arguably detached view of society has reduced the collective capacity to handle the reality of their situation or the underlying causes of their many failures<sup>733</sup>, instead turning on each other as discussed in the previous chapter.

This phenomenon within Anonymous is one that bears further exploration and provides an interesting insight into the causes and reasoning behind much of Anonymous' apparently tautological and self-defeating dilution of both organisational effort and of their distinctive visual identity which they carved out as an emergent reaction to the Church of Scientology in 2008. In *The Interface Effect* Alexander Galloway explores the personal and social issues of our increasingly online life including drawing on Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed*, a book

<sup>732</sup> Graeber, 205

<sup>733</sup> Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani. *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 149.

which focuses on the importance and relevance of paintings and cinema<sup>734</sup> to our lived experience, however elements of this discussion can be reconsidered as contextual parallels to our, and by extension Anonymous', social relationship to mass communication technology and to their own constructed yet diluted language/identity; '...the world of the image is present to us, but we were never present to it. So it is nearness with a catch...it is a desire to be brought near, but one already afflicted with a specific neurosis, that of the rejection of the self.'<sup>735</sup> Anonymous fashioned themselves from the self-circulated memes and the debris from the collective exhaust blast of the pop culture industry; building their own identity from sources which have no awareness of or require no acknowledgement from their audience; an unrequited, neurotic and self-destructive relationship with materials which accelerate the erosion of the self the closer one approaches them.<sup>736</sup>

Galloway likens this process of anonymity to Plato's allegorical/ethical construct the Ring of Gyges; an artefact which makes the wearer invisible and therefore immune from moral consequence<sup>737</sup>; a thematic basis for stories such as *The Invisible Man* as well as the One Ring from *Lord of the Rings*. There are examples of this kind of construct in action throughout Anonymous' history, particularly in the "proto-Anonymous" stage when /b/ and 4chan as a whole were feared for their capricious and merciless campaigns of harassment conducted in a vacuum of eroded individual and collective morality that even a notional contextual anonymity facilitates.

This is however a one-sided view of Anonymous' relationship to the systems which enabled their creation in the first place. The second part of Galloway's analysis expands on Cavell's work, exploring how the computer is an 'anti-Ring of Gyges' that its "wearer" can move around the environment plainly while the world changes and moves around them.<sup>738</sup> For Anonymous the former process would not have been possible without the latter; while they are beholden to a visual language whose components are ambivalent to their use, their creation was only possible through the melting pot of re-appropriation and Darwinian ecosystem these chimeric outpourings were born into. The effects of this dichotomous process

734 Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (UK: Polity Press, 2012), 10.

735 Ibid, 10-11.

736 Ibid, 10.

737 Galloway, 10.

738 Ibid, 12.



can still be seen today through the schismatic difference in motivation and methods used by Anonymous' various constituencies and the subsequent heated Twitter debates over their appropriateness or use.

This simultaneous disintegration of the self and mastery of a reflexive digital world has led to a networked political persona which is inherently duplicitous in its words and actions as well as in the form of its outward visage. This outward appearance is distinctive as a short-cut to politicising broad demographics of the disaffected and disenfranchised, which has the positive effect of growing the Anonymous 'brand.' The crowds in the streets may well be using the imagery and name of Anonymous in a politically mercenary fashion to signal-boost their own causes or for their own edification, but due to Anonymous' voluntary and tautological nature they are as valid as the hacker cabals and technical elites who act at Anonymous' sharp end.

The same open, voluntary traits of the Anonymous brand are also some of its major weaknesses. Anonymous may be recognisable through their hijacked pop-culture imagery which has stabilised over time, as discussed in chapter 5. This imagery has been attached to social and political causes around the world and copycat hacker groups have adopted the same type of visual language to draw on Anonymous' pedigree and reputation in turn. However, this expansion has affected the above process of diluting the self in proximity to an uncaring pop-culture mirror. Whether through the social media arguments or conflicting cacophony of Ressentiment displayed at public demonstrations, it is very hard for Anonymous' audience to grasp a simple, relatable concept from a constantly shifting chimeric hacker-activist singularity that appear to be pulling every direction at the same time.

There is, however a unifying theme behind the directions Anonymous pull themselves and their targets. This Ressentiment, this focus on extolling the virtues of the 'weak' in any situation calls back to Anonymous' gestation on 4chan, a place which to this day still frequently sees similar discussion among people who are (or claim to be) desperately poor, disaffected or lonely; using a shield of Ressentiment against so-called 'wage-cucks' or 'normies' with jobs, houses or who have any kind of genuine emotional connection to another human being. Anonymous appeared to have offered a tangible, or at least a believable, avenue to escape what Guy Debord describes as a tautological prison of mass communication

technologies which makes this self-shielding hatred of the successful and exoneration of the weak more palatable.

Due to the individualised nature of identifying with or acting as Anonymous it is hard to say whether Project Chanology was a case of the old Anons falling for their own propaganda or knowingly trolling the world. The subsequent snowballing of attention on Chanology and the operations that followed showed that there were gains to be made by launching theatrically-framed operations which focused on attacking ‘...capital and the state in the place where they are weakest, the terrain of representation.’<sup>739</sup>

This approach has worked in Anonymous’ favour to some extent, perpetuating the imagery and linguistic hooks to keep the ideas and constituent communities which make up Anonymous going through triumph and disaster. However it is impossible to look at Anonymous’ history and their activities without considering the effects of their actions. Despite their years of apocalyptic rhetoric and threats to destroy their targets, the US government has revoked internet neutrality legislation and the UK government has enacted more exacting surveillance policies. Protracted and bloody conflicts continue to rage throughout the world and the machinations of corporate and political elites continue to go unchecked. The paradox at the heart of Anonymous with regard to their lack of conventional progress is that such circumstances are where they have the potential to thrive the most; both in terms of targets/sources of Ressentiment to direct their efforts against and drawing in a wider range of the politically disaffected or marginalised. Anonymous’ endless treadmill of operations, public awareness campaigns and other activities serve the same purpose as their formative image board environment, one that puts them at odds with the manifestos and pre-determined goals of the parties and organisations they share the political media space with.

This makes the outlandish claims of the conspiracy theorists in the previous chapter all the more unfortunate for Anonymous as the two groups share many similarities in their application of Ressentiment as a motivating factor. Both groups align themselves against a monolithic and unassailable target to give themselves a sense of purpose or the agency that they otherwise may not have, or may not feel they have. This is further augmented by the

739 Lewis Call, “A is for Anarchy, V is for Vendetta: Images of Guy Fawkes and the Creation of Postmodern Anarchism.” *Anarchist Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008), 157.

nature of the online communication environment where most of the causes of this Ressentiment, whether social status, physical appearance or any limiting disabilities are irrelevant<sup>740</sup>. However as discussed, this moral elevation of what Nietzsche calls ‘the weak’ and Saul Newman discussed regarding the theoretical trap of Anarchist and Post-Anarchist movements means that whoever Anonymous are, and whatever they do, it is not in their interests in terms of survival/popularity to actually succeed in their more apocalyptic claims and demands. As discussed earlier, not only are Anonymous arguably not capable of effecting the seismic changes they shout for, certainly compared to more physically grounded and concentrated alternative political movements. Secondly they fall into the trap of external representation and the problem of translating aims/goals to a broader audience outside their own constituencies.

This reductive assessment of what Anonymous is and does would be a dour and one-sided point to conclude on. It would also be missing the point of what makes Anonymous popular on an individual level; providing an alternative to mainstream politics in which the individual participant can restore their lost agency through words and deeds which have the potential to draw the attention of global broadcast and social media audiences, even if only for a short time and if such actions land them in prison. It is this radically different approach to political operations which are collectively shared but individually anonymised, as well as driven by the base and emotive desires for attention and recognition which puts Anonymous at odds with the immaculately-managed PR faces of their targets and makes them harder to understand when comparing them along similar metrics.

This inscrutability is further exacerbated through the ironically individualised nature of the participatory relationship between Anons and the Anonymous identity, whose ‘true’ nature is unique to the experience and perceptions of the individual who adopts it; whether as the verbose and morally-impervious avatar of the Internet’s capacity for de-personalised vengeance against all enemies of free speech or as a force multiplier for popular resistance in streets and squares around the world. The problem is that, if the commonly-espoused ideals of rejecting frameworks of state control represented by concepts like membership or identity are upheld, then each of these interpretations is as valid as the next and therefore there is no ‘real’

<sup>740</sup> There are a number of exceptions relating to affording/being able to access a computer, whether related to physical/mental ability or the money to acquire the necessary PC hardware/internet connection.

Anonymous, no Barthesian final signifier which we can define them. Admittedly many of these sentiments are demonstrably untrue; there is a hierarchy of technical/artistic skill and of ownership/control of communication hubs such as popular Twitter accounts or IRC servers. When the arguments and power-struggles over these chokepoints spill out into the wider public sphere we can see that Anonymous are just as fallible, contradictory and short-sighted as the rest of us.

It is easy to dehumanise individuals or groups who operate outside the established hierarchical control systems, those who don't 'play by the rules;' criminals, hacker groups and terrorists who we are threatened with as a justification for increasing security/surveillance. It is easy to distance ourselves from either end of this spectrum, believing that we could never do the kind of things such groups attempt. In the case of Anonymous, when people acting in its name are arrested and exposed to the world they are not crazed terrorist masterminds, ghosts in the machine or the avatars of some cyber-singularity. Instead, behind the theatrical spectacle and sardonic malice they are people, just like the rest of us. A common thread of Anonymous' history and development has been that of reacting to external stimuli, a construct discussed critically herein. Much of what Anonymous did in the past to cement their reputation was to hold up a mirror to their targets by using the same methods, laughing as they raged against their own reflection. In doing this they hold up a mirror to us all; that we are all capable of such capricious malice, especially through an impersonal communications medium such as the Internet.

Anonymous developed their political sense of collective identity on this premise, on the eschewing of personally limiting morality to act against any group, company, government or individual deemed to be pushing beyond their perceived remit, fighting on the side of the 'weak' or 'victim' to a fault. The fundamental weakness in this approach is that it requires the involvement of their targets and the fulcrum of public opinion to swing in their favour. This then is perhaps the most damning element of Anonymous' Ressentiment in action; if their targets do not respond or engage with Anonymous' goading and challenges then their efforts are meaningless. Project Chanology was popular and news-worthy because the Church of Scientology kept playing along, kept feeding Anonymous with more ammunition. Part of the degradation of their operations since has been down to the lack of participation from their

targets. Anonymous needs to position themselves as the anathema to their targets to validate their own existence in turn. Regardless of their individual or collective success, in an era of increasingly widespread protests and damaging cyber-attacks<sup>741</sup> Anonymous have created linguistic and tactical templates which has been adopted by other similar and dissimilar groups around the world and have become a part of the Internet's political landscape.

Standing in Trafalgar Square on a certain November evening you can hear a wide array of personal grievances being shouted into the sky and at anyone who will listen. These range from the tragically mundane human collateral damage of government policies to the elaborately conspiratorial. Participating in Anonymous provides social cohesion and common ground to those lacking it in other areas of their life. Anonymous offers a participatory and autonomous avenue into political action for the disenfranchised and alienated strata of society<sup>742</sup>. The Anonymous of today is different to the Anonymous of 2011, the Anonymous of 2008 and the proto-Anonymous of 2004-2006; as it has changed the meaning of the symbols at the core of its visual language. What Anonymous means to those who identify with it continues to change and has done so throughout its tumultuous history. Anonymous has survived in one form or another for almost 10 years, which for a political movement born from the internet is a significant achievement. In whatever form Anonymous or those who come after them take, this form of media-savvy and collective politics is a phenomenon we should continue to expect.

741 Matthew Wall & Mark Ward, "WannaCry: What can you do to protect your business?" BBC News. Posted May 19 2017.  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-39947944>

742 Eleanor Muffitt, "Young people don't vote because politics is stupid, not us," *The Telegraph*, posted January 15, 2015,  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-2015/11346325/Young-people-dont-vote-because-politics-is-stupid-not-us.html>.

### Future Research

There are a number of possibilities for future research based on the frameworks established in this thesis. The primary avenue for this would be to engage in the fieldwork initially envisaged during the inception of this research; a long-term ethnographic study of Anonymous' social networks, structures and new directions in light of their developmental trajectory as described herein; Anonymous in 2016 and beyond is markedly different to both the pre-Chanology 'old Anonymous' and what it was until LulzSec in 2011, as such the character, attention and direction of the most popular and populous arms or branches have changed; one example would be the new 'OnionIRC' chat server, styled as a classroom of sorts that aims to 'arm the current and coming generations of internet activists with education'<sup>743</sup>. The decentralised nature of Anonymous means that there are no official online spaces; this approach would require a balanced sampling from an array of larger and smaller sites to produce a balanced general analysis or focussing on a single space such as OnionIRC for an in-depth ethnographic study. Another novel approach would be to conduct physical ethnography at the 'AnonymouS' (sic) Bar in the Czech Republic, a self-styled "Hideout of the Legion"<sup>744</sup>. Such actions could be balanced with further attendance/observation at November 5 'Million Mask March' protests in cities other than London; as discussed herein the character and focus of Anonymous around the world changes according to the influence/importance of regional/social concerns in which the identifying participants live and operate.

Alternatively this thesis presents alternative avenues of research into the political dimensions of the historical relationship between communications technologies and their use as tools of narrative disruption and subversion. This thesis has shown that since the Protestant Reformation there are continuous and clear points of similarity and comparison between these far-removed historical events and the current political climate relating to privacy, security, narrative control of information and the permitted reach of governments into the lives of its populace. As discussed in chapter 3, the comparison between Facebook's Free Basics program and the Public Libraries Act highlight that these points of comparison are continuing to emerge and develop.

743 Waqas Amir, "Anonymous Launches Dark Web Chat Service," *Hackread*, posted April 18, 2016, <https://www.hackread.com/anonymous-launches-dark-web-chat-service/>.

744 "Anonymous Bar," accessed April 8, 2016, <http://www.anonymousbar.cz/en>.



Anonymous are also not the only hacker-activist network; the Turkish left-wing group RedHack have been conducting similar operations to Anonymous<sup>745</sup>, the 'Ghost Squad' hacker team are a group loosely affiliated with and occasional allies with Anonymous, however they are also a separate entity unto themselves<sup>746</sup>. Other copycat groups like 'Lizard Squad' have operated DDOS campaigns against entertainment companies with similarly egoist and nihilist motivations to LulzSec<sup>747</sup>. Another area of research which would further round this study would be a wider consideration of Anonymous' interactions (or lack thereof) with the wider mainstream/activist organisations mentioned herein; Guy Fawkes-masked protesters have been visible at protests all over the world aligned to equally diverse causes. For all the collectivist talk of unity, solidarity and co-operation, how much does this play out in reality? As mentioned in the introduction this particular research was heavily limited in this respect, however understanding Anonymous' points of contact, cooperation and friction with other either more mainstream and stable activist/lobbyist/political organisations or with the more extreme whistle-blowers and leakers is a vital part of placing the Anonymous identity within this spectrum.

745 "\$670 Billion Served: An Interview with Redhack Hactivist Collective," *The Cryptosphere*, posted November 20, 2014, <https://thecryptosphere.com/2014/11/20/670-billion-served-an-interview-with-redhack-hactivist-collective/>.

746 Catalin Cimpanu, "Anonymous Ghost Squad Hackers Take Down Black Lives Matter Website," *Softpedia*, posted May 1, 2016, <http://news.softpedia.com/news/anonymous-ghost-squad-hackers-take-down-black-lives-matter-website-503579.shtml>

747 Jimmy Blake and Amelia Butterly, "Who are Lizard Squad and what's next for the hackers?," *BBC Newsbeat*, posted January 27, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/30306319/who-are-lizard-squad-and-whats-next-for-the-hackers>.

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